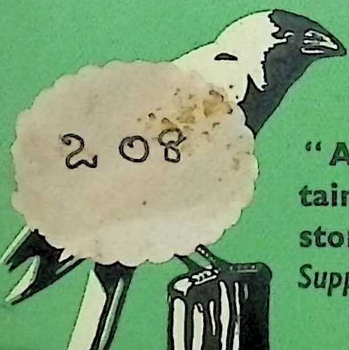
'JACKDAW' CRIME SERIES

No. 4

HERMAN LANDON

THE BACK SEAT MURDER



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Herman Landon

THE BACK SEAT MURDER

JARROLDS PUBLISHERS LTD.
Paternoster House, London, E.C.4

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY PURNELL AND SONS, LTD.,
PAULTON (SOMERSET) AND LONDON

CONTENTS

THE BACK SEAT MURDER

CHAPTER I

THE ASH PILE

IT was little after two o'clock in the morning, and the cellar of Mr. Christopher Marsh's house on the old Peekhaven Turnpike presented the unusual spectacle of a private secretary raking an ash pile.

Leonard Harrington worked with a grim and furtive air, as if engaged in an illicit enterprise. He had donned the cap and overalls belonging to old Stippett, gardener and handy man, and a pair of gloves protected the secretarial hands against grime and injury which might have betrayed their occupation with an unusual task. The electric light attached to one of the crosswise timbers in the ceiling showed an eager and determined look on his passably handsome face. There was a strain of excitement and suspense, too. Looking at him, one might have thought that Leonard Harrington was searching for diamonds in the ash pile.

It was a fairly large pile, and it represented last winter's accumulation of ashes. It was now the first week in September, and, within a month, the pile would be carted away and a supply of coal would take its place in a corner of the cellar. Working a few hours each night, Harrington faced a rather prodigious task if he meant to sift the entire heap with the remaining time.

Kneeling on the cement floor, he was attacking the mound with a small rake, a child's toy. Now and then he came to a clinker which he tossed aside after a glance. The finer stuff, after being dislodged with the rake, was sifted through his gloved fingers, handful by handful, and then cast to one side.

It was a slow and tedious task, and Christopher Marsh's private secretary appeared anything but patient. He grumbled now and then, and occasionally he gave a nervous start, as if he had apprehended some fugitive sound which threatened an interruption of his labours. There was no apparent reason for such nervousness, for it seemed unlikely that any member of the small household would take it into his head to visit the cellar at such an hour.

The bedrooms occupied by Christopher Marsh and his wife, the latter a confirmed invalid, were on the second floor and far off to one side of the house. The bedrooms of the servants—there were only four—were even more remote. Miss Lanyard, the nurse, whose services were necessitated by the hypochondria of the mistress of the house, occupied a room adjoining her patient's. All in all, it seemed that Leonard Harrington could have pursued his task in peace.

Moreover, neighbours were few and far between in this isolated locality, the nearest being a good mile away. Peekacre, the Marsh country home, stood in a grove of hemlocks situated some five hundred yards from what had once been the main highway, fallen into neglect and disuse since the

opening of the new State road. Thus, and aside from the lateness of the hour, there was no apparent reason why Harrington should fear an interruption.

Yet he was unmistakably nervous. At frequent intervals, he darted uneasy glances across the tracery of lights and shadows that covered the floor and walls. Possibly the raking of the ash pile was a deed of darkness that troubled a sensitive conscience. Or perhaps he had a morbid feeling that the shrewd, watchful eyes of Christopher Marsh had the power to penetrate walls. Then again it might be that he was disturbed by mental visions of Theresa Lanyard, the nurse.

He had often wondered about her during the three weeks he had been employed by Christopher Marsh. Her prim, sedate and almost severe appearance had evoked conflicting impressions in his mind. He had often wondered how she would look without her crisp white apron and peaked cap, without her primness and professional imperturbability. Was she as staid and dignified and coolly capable as she looked, or was she playing a rôle of some sort? Had she, like himself, entered the Marsh household under false pretences, in pursuit of some ulterior motive? There was no sound reason why Harrington should ask himself such questions, but it seemed he could not keep them out of his mind.

And now, as he knelt on the hard cellar floor, running handfuls of ashes through his fingers, these very questions were agitating his brain. Once or twice, he felt sure, he had surprised a vagrant glance out of Theresa Lanyard's eyes that was not in keeping with her demureness. In an unguarded moment,

he had seen a strange sort of smile trespassing upon her lips. And once——

He jerked up his head and stared across the cluttered cellar floor, most of it in shadow. In the next instant, he dropped the rake and sprang to his feet. Half-way down the stairs at the farther side stood a feminine figure draped in a dressing-gown. Her face was in dusk, but he fancied there was a faint, mocking smile on her lips.

"Miss Lanyard!" he exclaimed.

She came down the remaining steps and approached him, then surveyed his grimy overalls and dust-streaked face with an amused expression.

"Mr. Harrington, you're a sight," she declared.

Harrington found no answer. He felt exceedingly foolish, as if he had been caught in a disgraceful and compromising position. Miss Lanyard came a little closer.

"You are the most ambitious secretary I ever saw," she declared, a trace of irony in her voice.

He gazed at her stupidly, then glanced guiltily at the rake lying at his feet.

"Looking for anything particular in those ashes?" she inquired.

"Yes," he replied awkwardly. "I—er—lost a stickpin the other day and thought it might have got mixed up in this pile."

"Really?" There was mockery in her fine grey eyes. "You are not a brilliant success as a prevaricator. Couldn't you think of something better?"

"Give me time." In desperation, he was resorting to banter. "You took me by surprise."

"And you looked positively guilty. It's no crime to be poking about in a pile of ashes, is it?"

"Not exactly." At length, he was able to raise his eyes and meet her inquiring gaze. She was still smiling in a mocking way, but there was solemnity in her smile. Without the prim, shell-rimmed glasses, which she usually wore during the day, she seemed years younger. Not a day over twenty-four, he reflected. "Did I make a noise?" he added. "Is that why you came down?"

"No, I didn't hear anything. You are the quietest ashman I ever saw. Most of them make a dreadful noise. But I've been wondering about you, Mr. Harrington. You don't look quite genuine as a secretary."

"And you are not overly convincing in the rôle of a nurse."

She frowned a little and gave him a long, calculating look. Without her peaked cap and her professional manner, her face was quite attractive, he observed. There were signs of an inner tension, however. He saw little flickers of anxiety in her grey eyes.

"Then you think I'm a fraud?"

"A rather charming fraud."

Her mouth tightened a trifle.

"I wonder," she murmured, "if your name is really Leonard Harrington."

"And I wonder," he mimicked, "if yours is really Theresa Lanyard."

"No," she thoughtfully confessed. "It isn't."

He started. He had not been prepared for such a prompt and candid admission.

"But I am really a nurse," she added. "I worked in a hospital at one time. Are you a real secretary?"

"Mr. Marsh appears satisfied with my services."

"So it seems. I wonder what he would think if he should see you now."

"Yes, I wonder," Harrington murmured. "He would probably take another look at my credentials."

"That would be embarrassing, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, rather." He took out a handkerchief and mopped his face, then regarded her with new curiosity. "If I made no noise, what brought you down here?"

"Feminine inquisitiveness. One night last week I heard you walk down the hall at three o'clock in the morning. You didn't walk like an honest man. Your footsteps had a sort of furtive sound. The next night you did the same thing, and the night after that. I discovered you had acquired the habit of prowling about a lot in the small hours. Little by little, I got curious about you, and to-night I decided to investigate."

"H'm. You must be a light sleeper. Miss—er—Lanyard."

"Not exactly, Mr.—er—Harrington. But most of Mrs. Marsh's ailments—they are all imaginary, anyway—come on at night, and that keeps me awake a great deal. I usually manage to snatch a nap in the afternoon. Now, Mr. Ashman, we understand each other, don't we?"

"No," he said, shaking his head and gazing into her eyes, which seemed quite mysterious at this moment. "I don't think we have even begun to understand each other."

"Your fault. Men are always slow in such matters." For a moment, she looked at the two heaps of ashes, the small one and the big one. "So you think this is the place where David Mooreland was murdered, do you?"

He started, then stood stonily still, gaping at her. There was a tight, mirthless smile on her lips. One hand fumbled nervously with the girdle of the dressing-gown.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Who are you?"

"Does it matter? What we want to know is who murdered David Mooreland."

Impulsively he came a little closer and regarded her in astonishment. Now he could see that she was in the grip of an intense excitement. The slender figure within the dressing-gown was trembling.

"Isn't it true?" she demanded. "You want to know who murdered David Mooreland, don't you?"

He was silent for a moment, gazing into her white, tense face.

"Oh, I've known that for some time," he said.

The statement appeared to startle her.

"You *know!* You actually *know?* You have found some proof?"

Again he searched her face and hesitated.

"Oh, I don't blame you for being discreet, Mr. Ashman. You know nothing about me except that I call myself Theresa Lanyard and that I am employed here as Mrs. Marsh's nurse. I may be a friend, or I may be an enemy. It's always well to be circumspect. But tell me, why should a hard-working secretary spend his nights searching an ash pile unless he hoped to find—certain things?"

"Why, indeed?" asked Harrington stiffly.

Her grey eyes slanted toward one of the dusky corners of the cellar.

"Let me see. David Mooreland disappeared one day last March. To most people, his disappearance was a complete mystery. It was supposed that he had gone away and met with an accident. A few initiated ones know better. They know that he was about to lay certain unpleasant facts before the authorities—facts that would probably have sent Christopher Marsh to gaol for a long term of years. They also suspect—though they can't be positive as to that—that David Mooreland came to this house on the very day of his disappearance."

Harrington fixed her with a searching non-committal gaze.

"You are one of the iniated, I see," he remarked dryly. "Go on."

"Oh, there isn't very much more. Not much that is definitely known, at any rate. It is supposed by the initiated few that Mr. Mooreland was enticed here by some hook or crook and that he never left Peekacre alive. It is regarded as significant that his disappearance took place only two days before he was to lay his facts before the district attorney. Certain persons, friends of Mr. Mooreland's, have searched the vicinity, but they have found no trace of him. It seems certain that he died here."

She shivered, and her voice shook a little.

"Oh, yes, that's certain enough," Harrington declared. "He was murdered in cold blood."

"Who murdered him?"

"Our estimable employer, Christopher Marsh, of course."

She lowered her head and seemed to fight for control of her nerves.

"Do you know that, or are you only guessing?"

"No one else had a motive for the murder. Unless Mooreland had died that day, Christopher Marsh would now be in prison."

"Yes, I know. I have been thinking the same thing. But it doesn't really prove anything, does it? Do you know anything else?"

"Perhaps I do, but—" He came to a significant pause.

"I see. You hesitate to confide in me."

She lifted her eyes, and her gaze was straight and clear. A little of his instinctive reserve left him.

"Perhaps I do," he said, "but, aside from that, it isn't a pleasant subject to discuss with a young woman."

"I'm a nurse, you know." A pale smile came to her lips. "Nurses come up against a lot of unpleasant things."

"But this— Oh, all right." For a moment, his eyes went to the furnace and the battery of asbestos-lined pipes radiating from it. "I know that the body of David Mooreland was destroyed in that furnace."

She shuddered. In the dim light, her face took on a greyish hue.

"That is," Harrington added, "it was destroyed to the best of the murderer's ability. It seems he failed to realize that even in a raging fire a body can't be completely obliterated."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You found something in the ash heap?"

He nodded grimly. "Only a gold tooth so far. I found that last week. It has already been identified. I haven't finished yet. I may find other things. It doesn't really matter, though. The gold tooth is enough to establish the fact that Mooreland was murdered in this house."

"But it doesn't prove that Mr. Marsh murdered him."

"True, it doesn't." Harrington ground the words between his teeth. "I'll come to that later. Marsh will be convicted of murder before I am through."

There was a note of vehemence in his voice that made her open her eyes wide.

"Are you a detective in disguise? No, of course you aren't. Detectives take such things calmly, as a matter of routine. You—you talk as if you had a personal interest in the affair."

"I have, but suppose we don't go into that. It wouldn't interest you, and besides—" He paused, then looked at her with a new expression. "But what about yourself? You aren't a lady detective, are you?"

"Mercy, no!" She gave a strained little laugh. "My interest in the case is— But suppose we don't go into that either."

"All right." He laughed. "I won't pry into your secrets, or bore you with mine."

"But we might help each other," she suggested. "It seems we are both working with the same aim in view. That is, if you can trust me."

He regarded her steadily, in the manner of a man

who penetrates appearance and takes nothing for granted. Her face, warm, lovely, and yet tragic, was a different face from the one he had seen under the peaked cap.

"I can," he declared.

"Then we are partners."

Impulsively, she thrust out her hand, and he took it and held it for a moment. Thus, with dust in their nostrils, and creeping shadows all around, they sealed their compact.

Suddenly, he drew back. In an instant, he was all alertness. Theresa, head aslant, gazed through the dusk toward the stairs. Her chin quivered.

"What was that?" she whispered.

He tiptoed cautiously forward. His figure melted into the shadows at the farther side of the cellar. After a little while he came back.

"These old houses make all sorts of queer sounds at night," he remarked.

But his voice lacked conviction. He could not be certain, but hadn't there been a swift movement in the upper dusk as he glanced up along the stairway?

Had someone been listening?

CHAPTER II

STRANGE LETTER

The man who for the present called himself Leonard Harrington sat in the little study adjoining the library and waited for the buzzer to summon him into his employer's presence. While waiting, he occupied himself with a book of a size that just slipped snugly into his coat pocket. Leonard Harrington was a firm believer in the adage that reading maketh a full man.

Usually, the buzzer sounded on the stroke of ten each morning, for punctuality was Christopher Marsh's golden rule. Then, with his secretary's assistance, he would devote himself to his correspondence. It was an odd sort of correspondence for a man who had as varied and extensive business interests as had Christopher Marsh. The letters, it seemed to Harrington, pertained to everything under the sun except business. Often, they were of the most trivial nature; at other times, their meaning was obscure. The private secretary had no cause for complaint, however, for his duties were light.

They were so light, indeed, that he often wondered what Marsh wanted with a private secretary. The correspondence, such as it was, rarely occupied more than an hour each day. He suspected that Marsh's business interests were being managed by competent hands in the city and that he was only

making a specious pretence of directing them from his library at Peekacre.

Yet, though Harrington's secretarial duties were light, his freedom was greatly circumscribed. Marsh, it soon appeared, wanted him within easy call, day or night. His outdoor life was limited to short walks about the grounds and an occasional drive to the village to post letters or send telegrams. Aside from these brief respites, it seemed that his employer was reluctant to let him out of his sight.

These and many other circumstances had gradually turned Harrington to the belief that what his master really required was not a private secretary but a bodyguard. There were numerous indications that such was the case. Day by day during these three weeks, the older man had evinced a growing tension and nervousness, symptoms of a mental disturbance that expressed itself in a sour humour, a waspish disposition and a constant alertness. Everyone with whom he came in contact was subjected to the most thorough scrutiny. It was his habit to make the rounds of the house late at night and satisfy himself that all the doors were properly locked and the window fastenings securely applied. His bedroom door was equipped with an electrical alarm that would give instant warning of a stranger's approach.

All in all, it soon became apparent that Christopher Marsh was a man in fear for his life. Perhaps that explained why he had gone with his wife and a few trusted servants from New York, where all his interests were centred, to the seclusion and quietude of Peekacre. It was Harrington's impression that it had been a flight rather than a removal.

Marsh's life at Peekacre had all the aspects of a hidden existence. It was rarely he received a caller, rarely he ventured beyond the gate in the tall picket fence that surrounded the estate. Moreover, even during the first week of his employment, the secretary had made the discovery that his employer's whereabouts was known only to a few intimates.

It was indeed a curious arrangement, and the strangest part of it all was the fact that Marsh appeared to rely for his safety upon a man who was seeking to convict him of the murder of David Mooreland. And now it developed that Theresa Lanyard had insinuated herself into the Marsh household for the same purpose. And while the nurse and the secretary were working to uncover Marsh's secret guilt, Marsh himself was in mortal fear of an enemy. Who was that enemy, and why was he seeking Marsh's life?

Often in the past three weeks Harrington had put these questions to himself, and they were agitating his mind this morning while he waited for the buzzer's summons. The book had slipped neglected to his knee. Thoughtfully, he gazed out the window. There was a bleak drizzle out there among the shivering hemlocks, and by contrast the house had a warm and pleasant aspect. There would be a wood fire in the library this morning, and in two or three weeks the furnace in the cellar would be started. A pile of ashes and cinders loomed in Harrington's thoughts.

He rose and went to the window. He was tall and slender and moved with the resilient swing of a man whose muscles are in good trim. His garb was

modest and inconspicuous, as became a private secretary, yet there were subtle little touches here and there which bespoke an innate refinement. Strength was the outsanding characteristic of his face. It showed in the capable chin and in the penetrating quality of the ash-grey eyes. Yet there was a softer quality as well, a suggestion of the man who likes to play and dream occasionally. Just now, however, it was the dynamic quality, the touch of iron, that predominated.

The buzzer sounded, and his expression changed. In a twinkling, he became the efficient and methodical secretary. At any rate, he had succeeded in convincing Marsh that he was both efficient and methodical. From his desk, he picked up a notebook and pencil and walked into the library.

"Good morning, sir." His voice contained just the proper degree of respect.

Marsh gave him a curt nod. He was a man of medium height but of powerful build. Even the sagging flesh along his jowls could not dispute the fact that he possessed more than his share of mental and bodily force. As he sat there, in front of his massive rosewood desk, he was the very picture of a man who blasts and bullies his way to success. His eyes were small and surrounded by crinkling flesh, yet they had a frosty and dominant expression.

For a full thirty seconds he did not speak, but looked at his secretary in the sharp and contemptuous manner which he adopted toward some persons. A secret dread had bitten deep into his face of late, but he was doing his best to conceal it. And this morning there was a new shade of expres-

sion in his crusty visage—a look of sardonic humour, Harrington thought.

"There is only one letter this morning," he announced.

Harrington sat down in his customary chair and poised his pencil over the note-book, prepared to clutter the page with dashes and curlicues in fair imitation of stenographic characters. Afterward, he would transcribe the letter from memory—and his memory was so excellent that Marsh had suspected nothing so far.

He looked up from his notebook, wondering at his employer's delay in beginning the dictation, and again he caught a look of grim humour on Marsh's face. The man's sharp, flesh-environed eyes were looking straight at him, and their expression was not pleasant. In confusion Harrington glanced about the library, furnished with a classical simplicity which yet did not conceal the fact that Christopher Marsh was a very wealthy man. The older man's eyes seemed to follow him whichever way he turned. Why didn't Marsh begin, and was the meaning of that curious look in his face?

"This is a very confidential letter, Harrington," the other said at length. "This afternoon I want you to deliver it in person to Seneca Whittaker, the prosecuting attorney of this county. An appointment has been made for you to see him. You will take the car and time yourself so as to be at his office promptly at half past four. It is about two hours' drive."

"Very good, sir," said Harrington levelly, though his brain was seething with the thought that this

promised to be a very strange errand. "By the way, the car wasn't running well yesterday."

"Yes, I noticed it. Something wrong with the battery. A loose connection, probably. I could fix it myself." Marsh enjoyed puttering about in the garage, and he prided himself on his mechanical ability. "But you had better stop at that little service station at the crossroads and have it seen to. The man there is reliable. Allow an extra fifteen or twenty minutes for that. Now, here is the letter."

In an expectant mood, Harrington held his pencil over the notebook, and the first sentence spoken by his employer gave him a sharp start.

"'Certain recent developments have forced me to the conclusion that my life is in danger, and I am writing you this letter so that you may be prepared to take immediate action in the event that I should come to a sudden and violent end.'" He paused. "Get that, Harrington? Well, take your time and be sure to get it down right. 'A sudden and violent end.' Ahem. 'I have reason to believe that one or more persons are seeking my life. Although I am taking all reasonable precautions, these conspirators may succeed in their reprehensible efforts. If the worst should come to worst, I desire that the criminals shall be properly punished, and with that aim in view——'"

He paused again, noticing that Harrington's pencil had become motionless after a few flourishes.

"What's the matter, Harrington? You look sick."

With a great effort, Harrington controlled himself.

"I'm all right, sir. This is a bit unusual, that's all. Would you mind repeating?"

Grumblingly, Marsh repeated the last few sentences, then went on with the dictation.

"And with that aim in view I respectfully call your attention to the character of a young woman calling herself Theresa Lanyard, who has been employed here as nurse to my invalid wife. I believe that an investigation—' Good heavens, Harrington, can't you keep your mind on what you are doing?"

"I'm sorry, sir. This is a bit startling."

"Never mind how startling it is. Get it down! 'I believe that an investigation into Miss Lanyard's character and past life will prove illuminating. Various circumstances have come to my notice which would seem to indicate that she is not the sort of person she represented herself to be.' Got that, Harrington?"

"Yes, sir." The meaningless crows' feet danced and swam beneath the secretary's eyes.

" 'In short,' " Marsh went on with the dictation, " 'I believe that, in the event of my untimely death, you would find it profitable to subject this young woman to a thorough scrutiny. Furthermore, I suggest that a similar investigation might be made with benefit into the moral character as well as the past and present history of my private secretary, Leonard Harrington, who, I am convinced——' "

Harrington's pencil slid across the page, forming a jagged streak. He stared up at Marsh, and again he saw that look of sardonic humour in his face.

"Nervous this morning, Harrington? Up too late last night, perhaps. It seems I heard your door close at three in the morning."

With a heroic effort the secretary pulled himself together. Was Marsh indulging in a gruesome jest, or was he acting on a deep-laid plan?

"I think you were mistaken, sir," he managed to say. "But this letter? You are joking, aren't you?"

"Joking? Do I look like a man who would joke about his own death?"

"Hardly," Harrington had to admit. "But you must realize——"

"Realize nothing! Please take down what I say, and don't bother your mind with things that don't concern you."

"But you are practically accusing Miss Lanyard and me of plotting your murder?"

"Well, what of it? Aren't you?"

The blunt question and the accompanying incisive glance made Harrington gasp. Yes, Miss Lanyard and himself were surely plotting against Marsh, but where on earth had the man got the idea that they were plotting murder? Moreover, what perverted sense of humour could have induced him to dictate such a letter to him, Harrington?

"You will please go on," said Marsh dryly. "'—who, I am convinced, entered my employ under false pretences and with the deliberate intention of doing me harm.

"'Please do understand that I am not accusing either or both of the persons mentioned. I am merely suggesting that, if a certain eventuality should come to pass, you will find it profitable to investigate them. Yours very truly.' That's all, Harrington. Now snap out of it and come to life.

Make three copies and bring them to me immediately."

Harrington walked out in a daze and sat down at the typewriter. The text of the letter was fresh in his mind, but it seemed as if his fingers refused to obey him when he proceeded to type it out on paper. He made several errors and had to make a number of fresh starts. At length, he returned to the library and placed three sheets, an original and two carbon, before Marsh. The latter read carefully, then attached his scrawling signature to two of the sheets.

"Oh, I forgot. I want you to address two envelopes."

With his brain still in a whirl, Harrington returned to the other room and addressed an extra envelope. Returning and placing it on the desk, he received a frosty and inscrutable grin from Marsh. Then Marsh enclosed the original in an envelope, sealed it, and handed it to Harrington.

"This is the one you will deliver to Mr. Whittaker in person," he explained. "Bear in mind that you are to deliver it into his own hands. This carbon," folding one of the copies and enclosing it in the extra envelope, "will go to Mr. Whittaker by mail. I shall see to the mailing of it myself. It isn't likely that both of them will go astray."

He raised his head and bent a significant glance on the bewildered secretary.

"Remember that you are to be at Mr. Whittaker's office at half-past four. And don't forget to have the battery seen to. That's all."

He waved his hand in dismissal.

CHAPTER III

IN THE REAR SEAT

"How utterly ridiculous!" Theresa Lanyard exclaimed.

Harrington, meeting her as he went to his room to dress for his journey, had just told her of the astounding letter Marsh had dictated and the equally astounding instructions he had given. Everything considered, he thought it best that she should know.

"Ridiculous?" he echoed. Well, perhaps. Wish I could be sure. The whole thing looks like such unmitigated nonsense that I'm inclined to believe that Marsh has something up his sleeve."

"But what could it be?" The forehead beneath the white cap was delicately puckered. "We are not plotting against Mr. Marsh. At least—" with a quick glance up and down the hall—"we are not plotting to kill him."

"No, but evidently he thinks we are. Even so, it doesn't make sense. If he thinks we are after his life, why doesn't he do something besides write a letter?"

She fixed him a long, thoughtful glance.

"It may be his twisted sense of humour. That's the only explanation I can see. And it would be just like him to perpetrate a joke of that kind. I heard him chuckling to himself when he went out a while ago."

"Marsh went out? In this rain?"

"Yes, he did. It surprised me, too. He started off toward the main road. Curious, isn't it? It's the first time I've seen him go more than a hundred steps away from the house. Wonder where he was going."

"I know!" Harrington suddenly exclaimed. "To the post office. He had an important letter to mail. He'll have a nice, long walk, and I'll bet it took a lot of courage for him to start out. Hope he took his pistol along. By the way," and his face clouded of a sudden, "if anything should happen to him——"

"Yes," with a nod, "people would probably blame you and me? Mr. Harrington, are you going to deliver that letter?"

"Why not? Nothing is to be gained by destroying it. Whittaker will receive a carbon copy of it by to-morrow morning's mail. Marsh is now on his way to the post office to mail it."

She lowered her head and thought. Her face, now that she had dropped her artificial professional manner, was altogether womanly and attractive. Suddenly, she looked up again.

"I don't like it, I wish you wouldn't deliver that letter."

"But the carbon copy——"

"Yes, I know. That isn't what I mean. I mean that— Oh, I don't know. I just have a feeling that something is wrong."

"Then chase it away. Everything is all right. You see, I simply have to deliver the letter. If for no other reason, I must do it for your sake and

mine. Suppose something happened to Marsh. Whittaker will have the carbon copy. I'll wager Marsh wrote an annotation on it to the effect that his secretary is delivering the original in person. Whittaker will wonder why the original wasn't delivered, and that will lead to all sorts of ugly suspicions. You see, don't you?"

"Yes, but—" Her head drooped again. "I wonder if Marsh really intended that you should deliver the letter."

"What?" He stared at her for a moment, then laughed. "My partner is all tired out, I see. Too much excitement lately! Now you go to your room and try to sleep. I'll see you some time during the evening."

She moved away reluctantly, with a long backward glance, and Harrington went to his room and hurried into a change of clothes. A little later, with the astonishing letter tucked into his inside breast pocket, he went out to the garage and tried to start the sedan. The starter gave only the feeblest response as he set his foot on it. Either there was a loose connection, as Marsh had suggested, or else the battery was weak. Being a poor mechanic, although a very good driver, Harrington took the crank from the tool box and started the engine by hand.

In a few moments he was on his way, but the uneven functioning of the motor told that the battery was not doing its duty. He drew up at the garage situated at the point where the private driveway forked into the old Peekhaven Turnpike.

A stocky individual with a grimy face and in

greasy overalls came out from the little garage, which looked as if business were none too good in this desolate region.

"Trouble?" he inquired mournfully, and then, as his sluggish eyes travelled along the sleek streamer lines of the car, he brightened perceptibly. "Why, if it ain't Mr. Marsh's car! She's a good old bus. They ain't none better. No, siree! Some of the old tubs aroun' here would make you plumb sick to look at. But this one— Well, sir, she's a pippin!" He came closer, and his face relapsed into its former gloom. "You don't know anybody that wants to buy a nice garage, eh?"

"No," said Harrington, with an amused glance at the sorry-looking establishment. "You thinking of selling out?"

"I might. Trouble is that nobody wants to buy. You see, the garage is all right—as nice a little garage as you ever see—but the business has been rotten since the new State road went through a mile west of here. It's a wonder they wouldn't put the road where it'd do folks most good."

"It is," Harrington agreed, perceiving that the man's garrulity was due to sheer loneliness. He would gladly have stopped to chat for a while, but he would have to hurry if he was to reach his destination on time. "What's your name?" he inquired.

"Garbo—Luke Garbo," said the man mournfully, as if the name itself were an added affliction.

"Well, Mr. Garbo, I wish you would have a look at the battery and see what's wrong with it."

"Righto." With a lugubrious air, Mr. Garbo

went into his garage, returning shortly with a hydrometer. He stuck his head and shoulders through the rear door, removed the mat and floor boards, and after a while he straightened up and held the hydrometer to the light.

"Eleven seventy," he announced. "That means she's just about dead. Better let me charge her up for you. I've got a battery here you can use in the meantime."

Harrington approved the idea, and Mr. Garbo proceeded with the exchange of batteries. All the while, as he went about his task, he was muttering to himself about the state of his business and lamenting the fact that the new State road had ruined his prospects.

Harrington fell to inspecting the scenery. It was dismal enough, with a steady drizzle in the air and a raw wind sweeping over the hills. With the mist and the waning of the day, the horizons were narrowing, and the only dwelling within sight was a small hovel leaning against an immense boulder.

"Well," Garbo was muttering, "we're here to-day and gone to-morrow."

Harrington glanced back over his shoulder. He had not been listening to the man's mournful soliloquy. He had been thinking about the curious letter in his pocket and the strange things going on at Peekacre. Garbo's last muttered words caught in his mind, however.

"Apropos of what?" he asked.

The man straightened up from his labour and started to put the floor boards and mat back into place.

"Eh? Apro— Say, that's a new one, ain't it? I was just thinking about poor Mr. Marsh. He looks as if he wasn't long for this world."

"How so?"

"If ever a man looked as if he was goin' straight to his own funeral, that's him. He's got into the habit of talkin' to himself, too. That's allus a bad sign. I do it myself."

He chuckled dismally and gathered his tools.

"Oh, well," he sighed, "we're here to-day and gone to-morrow. Reckon you had better close these here winders. They's a heavy rain comin'."

He twirled the knob, raising the two windows in the rear, one on each side. Harrington started the engine, realizing he would have to hurry. He heard Garbo slam the side doors shut, and he caught another dolorous mutter to the effect that we're here to-day and gone to-morrow. Then he slipped the clutch in and swung into the highway.

The speedometer went from twenty to thirty, and then to forty, and there Harrington held it. The engine was fairly singing now, and he could easily have gone much faster, but the road was slippery, and he knew that the brakes were in poor condition and would not be much good in an emergency.

Garbo's weather prediction was coming true. It was raining harder and harder. As he set the windshield wiper in motion and closed the window on his right, another prophecy of Garbo's recurred to him. Mr. Marsh was not long for this world, the man had said. Only idle talk, perhaps but somehow the words lingered in Harrington's mind with a prophetic significance. And then he found himself

repeating Garbo's words: "We're here to-day and gone to-morrow."

He laughed at the absurdity of his own trend of thoughts. It was only empty talk that Garbo had poured into his ears, the meaningless chatter of a lonely man who seizes the opportunity to talk to someone. Yet it was true that Marsh himself lived in constant fear of death. His demeanour during the past few weeks, not to mention the preposterous letter he had dictated that morning, proved it. And now Harrington carried in his pocket a letter in which Marsh named the persons he suspected of plotting his death.

A motor's horn screamed in the rear, interrupting his thoughts. A glance into the rear-view mirror over the wind-shield showed a magnificent coach, with a liveried chauffeur at the wheel, approaching at terrific speed. Harrington, with a mental comment on some people's recklessness, edged over to the side, and the speed monster flashed past him.

Taking the wheel with one hand, he glanced at his watch. He had been driving nearly three quarters of an hour, and now the road was becoming a succession of steep hills and declines. Reluctantly, with a thought to the unsatisfactory condition of his brakes, he slowed down a little. The wind had risen, and it was driving the rain through the open window on his left. Already, his shoulder was wet. Since he would have no occasion to signal on this open road, he closed the window.

He would have felt quite snug and comfortable now if he could but have turned his thoughts away

from Marsh, from the letter in his pocket, and from the incoherent fears that Theresa had voiced just before they parted in the hall. She had said a very curious thing, he remembered, something to the effect that perhaps Marsh did not intend that the letter should be delivered. What on earth could she have meant by that? A woman's intuition, perhaps! Intuitions were usually vague and apparently senseless. But this particular intuition——

A thick exclamation fell from his lips. The wheel slipped in his hand; the car lurched wildly. Without apparent reason, he had just cast another glance at the rear-view mirror, and now he stared into it with the intensity of a man who doubts his senses.

He blinked his eyes and gave a feeble groan. It couldn't be, he told himself. It must be some sort of illusion. But there, in the rear-view mirror above the wind-shield, he saw it clearly—the coarse, crafty, and malevolently smiling countenance of Christopher Marsh.

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTOPHER MARSH!

AGAIN the car lurched and slithered. Luckily, it was a smooth and straight stretch of road, with no dangerous shoulders. Harrington righted the wheels and glanced again into the mirror and again his brain reeled. Back there, in the rear seat, sat Christopher Marsh, real as life. He did not move a muscle. He only grinned in a gloating satisfied way.

They were plunging down a steep hill now, and the road claimed Harrington's full attention, even though his brain was a-whirl with the picture of Marsh sitting so complacently in the seat behind. Where had he come from? When had he got into the car? Not during the stop at the garage, Harrington felt certain, for there had been no other person about, and he had chanced to look behind just a moment before Garbo slammed the doors shut. It was equally certain that Marsh had not been in the car when Harrington left Peekacre. If he had been, he would have been discovered at the garage. It appeared, then, that he must have got in while the car was going between thirty-five and forty miles an hour.

Harrington shook his head. No human being could do that. It was impossible. The only clear fact was that Marsh was now sitting in the back

of the car, and it was idle to wonder how he had got there. It was not only idle, but staggering as well.

The perilous descent was over, though Heaven only knew how he had managed it safely. He was at the bottom of the hill now, and he let go the accelerator and put his foot on the brake. It responded grudgingly, but the friction sufficed to lessen the momentum.

"Go on!" Marsh directed in his habitual bullying way. "Don't stop!"

Harrington's mystification had turned to obstinacy, and now obstinacy turned to disobedience. He bore down hard on the brakes. There came a metallic squeal, the car rolled on a little farther, then stopped.

"Are you deaf?" Marsh bawled. "I told you to go on."

"I heard you," said Harrington. He threw the gear into neutral and applied the emergency, then swung around in his seat and stared at the man behind him as if to satisfy himself that he was really flesh and blood. "So it's really you," he said foolishly.

"Of course," Marsh growled. "Who else would it be?"

Harrington nodded dazedly. What mystified him was not that the man in the rear seat was Marsh. He would have been just as deeply mystified if it had been anyone else. He stared stupidly at the two windows, misty with rain, and the two doors, both locked, as was shown by the upturned handles. And then, in order to steady his brain, he turned

and glanced over a landscape of hills swept by wind and rain.

It was growing dusk. The horizons were crowding closer and closer. As far as eye could see, there was no dwelling anywhere, no sign of life.

"Drive on, you fool!" Marsh ordered. "Think I want to sit here all night?"

Harrington turned to him again. The man's face was, as usual, a little red. The veins in his temples stood out prominently, as they always did when he grew irritated. The eyes were cold and contemptuous. With all this, there were signs of an inner satisfaction—a malicious satisfaction, Harrington thought. The man might have been brooding over a diabolical joke.

"I didn't see you get in," Harrington remarked, his brain still a-whirl with the riddle of Marsh's presence in the car.

"It's my car, isn't it? Do I have to beg your permission to ride in it?"

"No, but you might explain how you got in."

"The devil with your impudence!" Marsh snarled. "Now drive on, or I'll throw you out. Take the next turn to the left."

"The left? That's not the way."

Marsh bared his teeth. For an instant, he looked as if he were inclined to drive his fist into Harrington's face, but evidently he thought better of it.

"I said the first turn to the left," he spoke sharply. "I want no arguments. Drive on."

As if the matter were settled, he leaned back against the cushion and drew a cigar from his vest pocket.

"What about the letter?" Harrington asked, determined to elicit some explanation from the man in the rear seat.

"Never mind the letter." Marsh was fumbling in his pockets for a match. "I've changed my plans."

Harrington regarded him obstinately. He had dropped all pretence now of being the respectful and deferential secretary. He cast a long glance up and down the road that wound like a gleaming ribbon under the downpour. There was not another car in sight. The thought came to him that out here, in the swirling wilderness, the relationship of master and servant had ceased.

"Very well," he said. He reached out his hand and, turning the ignition switch, silenced the humming of the engine. "We stay where we are until you explain a few things."

"Oh, do we?" Marsh's hand came out of his pocket, and with it came a wickedly gleaming automatic. "Your mistake, Harrington. We go on this moment. Start her up and step on her."

Harrington gazed contemptuously into the menacing eye of the pistol. An unreasonable stubbornness was upon him.

"No, Marsh, you can't frighten me that way. We are not going on. If we move at all, which is doubtful, we turn back to Peekacre. Unless you explain and——"

He paused. He looked into Marsh's eyes, and what he saw silenced the words on his tongue. It was murder—cold-blooded, deliberate murder. For a moment, his gaze lengthened, and then he

turned back and started the motor. A derisive guffaw came from behind, and with it came a puff of smoke. Marsh had lighted his cigar and was enjoying himself. But a glance at the rear-view mirror showed that his aim with the pistol was unwavering.

Harrington threw in the clutch and set the car in motion. He chuckled grimly. Marsh's pistol had not frightened him, but that look in the man's eyes had gone like an electric shock to his brain. Yes, he had read murder in those eyes. Far more plainly than words could, they had told him that, in another moment, Marsh would have shot him dead. It was no use debating whether Marsh would or would not do such a thing, Harrington knew. And he was far from ready to die as yet.

"Don't forget the left turn," Marsh called out.

Harrington laughed again. He knew he would take the left turn when he came to it. It would be either that or death. And death repelled him, not because he feared the process of dying, but because it meant the end of everything. Marsh might kill him later, of course. Perhaps that was his intention. All Harrington could do for the present was to play for time.

"Now," said Marsh, and Harrington felt a cold pressure against his back. In the gathering dusk, he saw, a short distance ahead, a road branching off to the left. It was a rough and narrow road winding into a wooded wilderness as black as the descending night, but he slowed down and made a sharp turn. A chuckle sounded behind him. The pressure against his neck eased.

It was a stiff upward climb now. It grew rapidly darker as they penetrated into the jungle. He switched on the headlights and cast another glance into the mirror. The pistol was lying on Marsh's knee, ready for instant action. The man was leaning back and smoking his cigar with an air of keen enjoyment. In the surrounding dusk his face, as reflected in the mirror, looked curiously white.

The ascent grew steeper, the landscape blacker. The engine began to labour, and Harrington shifted into second gear. The road seemed to extend endlessly into the hills and the howling night. Presently, they came to a level space. In the distance, a rambling structure with an air of decay and desolation about it stood revealed in the headlights' glare.

"Stop!" Marsh directed, and Harrington brought the car to a standstill. A puff of strong cigar smoke drifted across his shoulder. The mirror showed Marsh leaning forward, with the pistol in his hand.

"Good place to die—eh, Harrington?" he suggested conversationally.

Harrington's body tensed. Rigidly he gazed into the mirror above the wind-shield. Had Marsh directed him to this desolate spot only to kill him? He could see a smile on the man's face, dark, brooding, horrible. He worked his wits at frantic speed.

"It's an appropriate spot," the other went on. "It's dark, quiet and rugged. A shot wouldn't be heard by anybody but the squirrels. A body left lying here wouldn't be found in a thousand years. See that old ruin straight ahead? It was once a

summer hotel. The management went bankrupt because the place was too far from everything. You can't complain that I haven't selected a romantic spot for you to die in."

Harrington spurred his wits to greater effort. He knew the revolver was levelled at his back. He was positive now that Marsh meant to kill him. Only his wits could save him, and his wits seemed utterly inadequate to the emergency. Again he looked into the mirror, trying to gauge his chance if he should attempt a sudden somersault over the back of the seat.

Hopeless, he decided. Marsh would shoot at the slightest move, and he would shoot to kill.

"Why do you want to kill me?" He was sparring for time.

"Don't you know?"

"I know what you said in that absurd letter."

"It was true, wasn't it?"

"It was ridiculous." Harrington's hand moved furtively to the door at his left. Here was another slender chance. He might succeed in throwing the door open and leaping to the ground before Marsh could shoot. But he would have to be as swift and agile as one of the wild beasts that inhabited the jungle on all sides. "I never had the slightest intention of killing you. Neither did Miss Lanyard."

"You are a liar, Harrington, and I'm going to kill you."

Harrington felt his heart crawling toward his throat. He had an agonizing feeling that in the very next moment a deadly slug would tear through his body. He held his breath. But the crack did

not come. The man in the rear seemed to take a fiendish delight in playing with his victim. Again Harrington's hand moved furtively toward the door handle of the car.

"You're name is not Harrington," Marsh went on, "and you're a rotten secretary. You came to me with forged credentials. Oh, I'm on to you. I haven't said anything, but I've had my suspicions. If you didn't come to me with the idea of killing me, why did you come?"

Harrington hesitated. With his hand on the door handle, he cast another glance into the mirror. He could see that Marsh's hand was steady, that his aim was deadly. If he could but shake that deadly aim for a mere instant!

"Let go that handle!" Marsh bawled, and Harrington recoiled from the pressure of hard steel against his spine. "One move, and you die!"

Harrington laughed grimly. He would die, anyway. A few seconds or minutes did not matter. He might as well grasp this despairingly slender chance. But the chance would be somewhat improved if, for but a split second, he could divert Marsh's mind from his murderous aim.

An inspiration came. With a sharp inward thrill, he turned his head and faced the man in the rear.

"Why did you kill David Mooreland?" he asked.

And then he saw the face in the dusk grow white. He saw Marsh's hand tremble. The pistol wavered. This was his chance to jump for his life. But Harrington sat motionless, enthralled and fascinated by the look of devastating fear he saw in the man's

face. The spectacle held him spellbound. He stared and stared.

And then, as he stared, the face in the dusk changed horribly. The eyes grew round; the mouth dangled open in an expression of overwhelming surprise. Harrington felt he was seeing something unreal, inexplicable. And now Marsh's chest heaved forward. An awful scream came. It soared piercingly in the scale, broke curiously in the middle, dwindled down to a stream of gasps and groans.

"Good grief!" broke shakily from Harrington's lips.

It seemed as if the hills and the wet, howling night were still echoing that awful scream. Now Marsh's head slumped slackly to the shoulder. The lips moved grotesquely, but the movement ceased even while Harrington was staring into the hideously twisted features. Then came a final groan, a rattle in the throat. The eyes in the dusky face rolled and grew filmy.

CHAPTER V

THE ABANDONED HOTEL

"DEAD!" Harrington muttered. He bent in stony rigidity over the back of the front seat. The spectacle he had witnessed was brain-stifling and body-numbing. Marsh's sudden appearance in the car had been mystifying enough. But this—this was positively uncanny.

Marsh's body had slumped back against the rear seat. It was still sagging and settling itself against the cushions. The face was turned up at a slant, and along the throat, toward the neck, there was a reddish trickle.

"Murder," said Harrington. His mind formed the thought mechanically. Yes, of course, it had been murder. First the sudden scream, and now the reddish trickle along the throat, testified to that. But how— Harrington's mind stood still. It seemed as if the black night itself must have incarnated itself in a murderer's form.

Slowly, vacantly, in the dim light thrown back by the lamps, his eyes travelled over the rear of the car. If there had been a murder, there must have been a murderer. The murderer must have stolen up to the car while it was standing here on the hilltop. In some incomprehensible way, he had escaped the notice of the two occupants. He had opened one of the rear doors, struck the

murderous blow, and vanished. And he had performed the deed so swiftly and quietly that he had been neither heard nor seen.

Harrington shook his head groggily. No, such a thing was impossible. One of them, if not both, would have seen him. No mortal could commit a murder in such a stealthy fashion. Still, the deed had been done. Marsh was dead. He had died before Harrington's eyes. Harrington had seen his face convulse in the agony of death. And so he was forced back to the conclusion that the murderer had stolen up to the car, unheard and unseen, and accomplished his deed.

His brain reeled. His eyes were still travelling about the dusky interior of the car. Four nickel handles, one on each door, gleamed vaguely in the dusk. Harrington's eyes widened. He stared stupidly at the four nickel fixtures. *Three of them were turned up*. With the handles turned up, the doors, when slammed shut, locked themselves automatically. The exception was the door on the right side of the driver. That one had to be locked and unlocked with a key.

A mutter of utter stupefaction fell from Harrington's lips. It seemed as if an insuperable riddle had arisen out of the night. The two rear doors and one front door were locked from the inside. The windows were also closed. Neither the doors nor the windows could be opened from the outside. How, then, had the murderer reached his victim?

There was, of course, the door on the driver's right. That one could be opened from the outside. But only a man endowed with a miracle-performing

faculty could have slipped in through that door without being seen. Harrington had been sitting right there, in the front seat, and he had turned to face Marsh at the time. If the assassin had struck the blow from that direction, Harrington would have seen him, heard him, and felt him. It was flatly impossible.

To make certainty doubly certain, he switched on the ceiling light and inspected the space on his right. There was not a vestige of moisture. If the door or window had been opened for but an instant, the wind-driven rain would have poured in on the cushion. But the whole thing was simply unthinkable.

He roused himself from his stupor and reached for the flashlight in the side pocket of the car. He was grimly determined to ascertain how the incredible thing had happened. One thing was certain, even if all the rest was a mocking delirium. No matter how the murderer had entered the car, he could not have approached it without leaving the imprint of his feet in the soggy dirt road.

Wriggling over to the right side, he opened the door and stepped out. A gust of wind and rain beat against his face. Little rivulets of water ran across the clayey road, which was scarcely more than two ruts with a weed-grown ridge in the middle. He swept his flashlight back and forth, and again a mutter of stupefaction fell from his lips. There was not a mark of a foot anywhere, either in the road or on the running boards.

He chuckled idiotically. The impenetrability of it was getting on his nerves. The murderer must

have dissolved himself into a bodiless sprite. But once more he walked around the car, searching the mud for footprints. There were no traces of any kind. He stopped in the back and gazed stupidly at the rear window. He had not thought of it until now. But this kind of a window could be opened neither from the inside nor the outside, and a touch told him that it was securely fastened in its frame.

"Stumped!" he muttered. He was not only stumped, but stupefied as well. A thing like this challenged all reason. He walked around to the front and returned the flashlight to its place. Then, leaning over the front seat, he stared down into the space between the two seats. Marsh's pistol was lying there on the rubber mat where he had dropped it, the muzzle almost touching his toe.

Harrington gazed pointedly at the mat. Beneath it was the floorboard, and under the floorboard were the connecting rod and a compact assemblage of shafts and levers. With the prevalent passion for low-slung bodies, manufacturers were utilizing every inch of space. Not even the smallest dwarf, and hardly a small dog or cat, could squeeze into that narrow space under the floorboard. No, the solution was not there.

He shook himself. He doubted if the solution was to be found anywhere. He stared into the swirling rain, along the path of light projected by the lamps and into the black jungle beyond. Suddenly, he stood rigid. Far ahead in the watery gloom there was a flicker of some sort, an evanescent light.

His hand went to the dashboard and switched out the headlamps. Darkness rushed upon him, obliter-

ating everything, but straight ahead, somewhere in the neighbourhood of the abandoned hotel, he saw a feeble light. Back and forth it moved, as if someone were carrying a lantern. He rubbed his eyes. In the surrounding gloom the moving light had a ghostly character. A vagrant thought flashed across his mind. The murderer?

His brain was in an uproar. Clear thinking was impossible. But it was curious that someone should be moving about in a hotel that had been closed for years and was only a short distance from the scene of the murder. He took the flashlight from the side pocket of the car, and then he reached over the seat and picked up the dead man's pistol. Then he set his face against the driving wind and rain and broke into a run.

He slithered and stumbled, and twice he fell. The road was like glue under his feet. Stronger and stronger grew the conviction that the murderer had taken refuge in the old, abandoned hotel. There was little reason and not much logic behind the conviction. It was only a blind belief. And, ordinarily, he would not have exerted himself to apprehend the slayer of Christopher Marsh. But the circumstances made all the difference. The attendant incidents made the murder a personal concern of Harrington's. And in the morning the dead man's ante-mortem statement would reach Mr. Whittaker, the district attorney, throwing suspicion upon Theresa Lanyard and himself.

He brought up against a gate hanging perilously on loosened hinges. "Hilltop View Hotel" read the faded and battered sign in the arch above the

posts. He pushed through and, by the aid of his flashlight, picked his way along a driveway overrun with weeds. For several minutes now, he had seen nothing of the light he had noticed in the vicinity, but possibly it was obscured by the thick clumps of trees.

It seemed as if the piazza, reached by half a dozen rickety steps, would collapse under his feet. Caution bade him extinguish his flashlight, for it would render him an easy target in case anyone should take a shot at him. In the dark, he moved along the wall and fumbled for a door. Rotting boards creaked under his feet, but luckily the whole house was creaking before endless gusts of wind, so there was little danger that the noise would betray him.

The door, when he found it, was locked, but it was a simple thing to reach his hand through one of the broken glass panels and release the bolt. Evidently, no effort had been made to save the house from decay and pilferage. He was now in a narrow enclosure, evidently an entrance hall, and at the farther side was another door. This one was unlocked, and he passed through. Inside the air was stifling, and the darkness was so intense that it made his eyes ache. For a while he listened tensely, but there were no other sounds than the wind's hoot and the creak of decaying timbers. Still wondering what could have become of the light he had seen, he flashed on his torch.

Except that it was almost denuded of furniture, he was in the typical lobby of the typical small summer hotel. A few pictures, not worth the cost of carting away, hung on the walls. There was a

broken-down sofa and a rocking-chair with a rocker missing. Straight ahead was a semi-circular desk, and, at one side, a stairway. Despite his excitement, he looked rather longingly at a brick fireplace. In his drenched condition, a fire would have been a great comfort. There were neither logs nor kindling, however.

In a moment he was moving toward the stairs, determined to make a quick search, but, after a few steps, he paused. His fingers, acting more quickly than his brain, extinguished the flashlight. Instinctively, he reached for the pistol he had picked up from the floor of the car and placed in his pocket. It was a satisfaction to know that it was still there.

From the upper regions of the house had come a sound that did not have its origin in the storm. He tiptoed a little closer to the stairway, then stopped and strained his ears. Someone was moving up there, moving toward the upper stairway landing. Now he could hear a voice speaking in a conversational tone, so, evidently, there were two persons approaching, or else it was someone talking to himself.

He came forward until his hand touched the stairway post. The footfalls were drawing closer, and now he could hear a second voice—a woman's! He gave a little start. It seemed strange to find a woman in a place like this, and on such a night. Soon they would be coming down the stairs, and, in all probability, they would turn on a light, and then he would be discovered. Even now he could see the wavering light of a candle approaching the upper landing.

For a moment longer he listened to the voices, felt an odd sort of thrill shooting down his spine, and then he picked his way quietly to a door he had seen under the stairway. He had suddenly determined that he did not wish to be discovered as yet. He entered, found the space behind the door was only a closet and not big enough to permit him to stand upright, so he got down on his knees and pulled the door to, leaving only a narrow crack.

"You see," said a masculine voice, "there is nobody else here."

Harrington caught a brief glimpse of a slender, dark-faced man walking up to the desk and placing a candle on it.

"I can't understand it," said a feminine voice, and Harrington started sharply. Theresa Lanyard! He could not see her, but he thought she was standing close to the closet door. "I'm certain he intended to come here."

"What made you so certain?"

"Where else would he go?"

"The world is wide. Roads are running in all directions. As for this forsaken hilltop, it's the last place in the world I'd wish to go a night like this."

"But you are not Cristopher Marsh."

"And I certainly thank my stars for that!"

The speaker had a fine, resonant voice, but Harrington thought there was something vaguely unpleasant about it. He wondered whether Theresa had come to the hilltop with the dark-faced man, or whether they had come separately. Suddenly, he remembered the magnificent coach that had torn past him on the road at such terrifying speed.

"What an awful storm!" Theresa murmured.

"Atrocious!" the other agreed. "This is really a romantic spot, though—an ideal setting for either a kiss or a murder. I'm not in a murderous mood to-night. What about a little kiss?"

"Oh, I'm not at all in the mood for that. Kisses require a moon and a caressing breeze to be wholly satisfactory."

"Sorry. I can't deliver either the moon or the breeze. I'm plainly out of luck. It's been a pleasant surprise, though. When I heard your footsteps a while ago, I never imagined it was you who had come to share my wretched solitude."

Harrington listened attentively behind the closet door. One of his questions had already been answered. Theresa and the man had arrived separately.

"I was as surprised as you were," she told him.

"And as pleasantly, I hope. By the way, how did you come?"

"I telephoned Mr. Carmody and asked him to lend me his car and chauffeur. I didn't explain. Mr. Carmody is always obliging. The car is now waiting in a clump of trees off the road. I thought it best not to leave it in too conspicuous a place."

"Splendid. It's rare and refreshing to find a charming face coupled with an astute brain. I am proud of my little confederate."

Harrington started. Confederate? What sort of understanding could exist between Theresa Lanyard and this sleek, dark-faced man with the subtly unpleasant voice?

"I'm frightfully curious, Mr. Stoddard," she

confessed, her bantering tone edged with a trace of uneasiness. "You haven't told me yet what you are doing here."

"Hilltops intrigue me," said her companion vaguely. "They give one such a lofty outlook upon life, and one never knows whom he may meet."

"Oh, Mr. Stoddard! You are being tantalizing."

"No, I'm being discreet. You are the tantalizing one. I find you prowling about in a tumble-down old hotel, and you tell me you came here to save somebody from being murdered. I ask who the somebody is, and all I get is a lot of evasions. Isn't that being tantalizing?"

"No," she replied, throwing his own words back at him, "it's being discreet."

"Then you don't trust me?"

"Do you trust me, Mr. Stoddard?" she countered.

There came a little pause. Harrington would have given a great deal for a glimpse of Theresa's face just then, but it was not prudent to open the door wider.

"No, I don't," said the man addressed as Mr. Stoddard, and Harrington discovered that his heart, for no apparent reason, had accelerated its beat. The air in the closet was suddenly stifling. A vague, inexplicable uneasiness was creeping upon him.

"Why?" she asked, and Harrington detected a note in her voice which told that she was fighting a rising dread. "Didn't you call me your confederate just now?"

Stoddard paced the floor for a few moments before replying.

"Miss Lanyard," he asked, "what were you doing in the attic a little while ago?"

"At—attic?"

Stoddard laughed disagreeably.

"You were there. Don't trouble to deny it. You see, I had been aware of your presence in the house for ten or fifteen minutes before I accosted you. I was curious to see what you would do. Come now, why did you go up to the attic?"

"I—I was looking for somebody."

"That's a lie," said Stoddard bluntly.

Harrington rose from his kneeling position and stood tense and crouching behind the door. A series of quick footsteps told that Stoddard had walked up to the girl.

"Very charming," he was saying sarcastically, "but, oh, so false! Now I'm going to use a few plain words. You are a lying, cheating, two-faced, double-crossing crook. I have suspected it for some time. Now I know. As I remarked before, this is a beautiful place for a murder."

"You—you wouldn't—" Theresa gasped out; and then his fine, resonant but vaguely sinister laugh suddenly cut her off.

"Oh, wouldn't I? Look at me. What do you think?"

Another pause fell heavily on Harrington's nerves. His hand moved to the pocket where he kept the pistol that had belonged to the dead man.

"I believe—you would!" Theresa exclaimed in a hollow tone.

"Correct, I would. I am alarmed over your visit to the attic. It convinces me that you have turned

traitor. However, murder is a serious matter. I must consider. And in the meantime I—" He laughed again, as if a humorous thought had occurred to him. "In the meantime, you will return to your beloved attic and remain there for a while."

Rapid steps sounded, and a dull cry broke from Theresa's lips. Pistol in hand, Harrington stepped out.

CHAPTER VI

BOLD MAN

STODDARD, dark and lean-bodied and well-groomed, had seized the girl's arm. He had the type of intellectual features that might denote either a genius in lawful pursuits of a genius in villainy. At the sound of Harrington's hurried steps, he whirled round and gaped. Theresa's eyes grew round with astonishment.

"Who the devil are you?" Stoddard demanded. "Oh, I see! The new secretary at Peekacre! I recall seeing you once of twice. And so you have been playing eavesdropper in that closet. Well, well! Is that the sort of work Marsh is paying you for?"

Quickly, and yet with a casual air, his hand went to his hip pocket. Theresa gave a sharp cry, and Harrington raised his pistol. Stoddard shrugged and let his hand fall back.

"The advantage is yours," he conceded. "What do you propose to do with it?"

Harrington's eyes went to Theresa. Her face was white, her chin quivered. Her astonishment, following her recent shock at Stoddard's conduct, was acute. She stared at Harrington as if he had risen out of the floor.

"Who is this man?" Harrington asked.

She did not answer, and Stoddard replied in her stead.

"I have the dubious honour of being Miss Lanyard's accomplice, in a manner of speaking. That is, I was until a little while ago. Then I caught her in an act that opened my eyes to her treachery."

Theresa shrank back a step and regarded him with an expression of keen aversion.

"We'll go into all that later," said Harrington. His mind was revolving the thought that here, perhaps, was the murderer of Christopher Marsh. He had heard nothing while he stood in the closet which conflicted with such a conjecture. Stoddard's clothing and shoes were dry, he observed, but he might have worn raincoat and rubbers. "Stand back against the wall and hold up your hands," he directed.

"Too strenuous," Stoddard objected. "It would give me a cramp in the arms."

"Instantly!" said Harrington sharply, making an ominous gesture with the pistol.

"I abhor melodramatics." The man yawned superciliously. "And you can't frighten me with that pistol. I know you are not going to shoot me. However, if you feel so inclined, shoot away."

With superb nonchalance, he swung on his heels and walked evenly toward the door.

"Good night," he called back over his shoulder. "See you later, Miss Lanyard."

Harrington stared after him. He could not help but admire such insolence and courage. Suddenly, he dropped the pistol into his pocket and ran in pursuit, but he was an instant too late. The man broke into a run, and he had disappeared into the

howling blackness by the time Harrington reached the piazza. With a sense of frustration, he returned to the room where he had left Theresa.

She had stood staring thoughtfully at the candle on the desk, but she turned as he entered and regarded him with an inscrutable expression.

"He got away," he announced. "He'll get a good drenching."

She nodded absently.

"So you didn't deliver the letter," she murmured.

"The letter?" His hand went toward his breast pocket. He had almost forgotten. "No, I didn't. You see, I—" He stopped, deciding he would not go into gruesome revelations just now.

"You changed your mind," she finished for him, misinterpreting his hesitancy. "But I don't understand. What are you doing here? What do you know about this place?"

He smiled sombrely. His thoughts went back to the car he had left in the road and its gruesome freight.

"I knew nothing when I started out," he admitted, "but I'm learning fast. The place seems to be a rendezvous for certain people. It appears that there is some mystery about the attic. That's about all I've learned so far. Perhaps you will tell me the rest."

"Oh, some time. It's a long story, and I'm dreadfully tired. But you are entitled to an explanation. I don't know what Mr. Stoddard might have done to me if you hadn't come to my assistance just in time. He is a dreadful man. I believe he is capable of murder. Yes, I believe—" She

shivered, and her voice dropped to an unintelligible whisper.

"Yes, and you probably heard him call me a liar, a cheat, and a crook. It was true. I am all that. That is, I've cheated Mr. Stoddard and lied to him. I've been playing both ends against the middle."

"Marsh and Stoddard being the two ends," he suggested.

"Yes, and I've played them against each other to find out who murdered David Mooreland."

"Good grief!" Harrington exclaimed under his breath.

"You see," she went on, "I've never been convinced that it was Mr. Marsh who killed Mooreland. I've been just as ready to believe that Mr. Stoddard was the murderer. Either that, or else they planned it together. There were lots of reasons for suspecting either of them or both of them. And so I've kept them both dangling, in a way. Mr. Stoddard knew I had an ulterior motive in getting the position of nurse at Peekacre, but he was mistaken about the motive. To-night, thanks to my carelessness, he stumbled upon the truth."

Harrington gazed at her in amazement. A thousand questions were thronging his mind, but he refrained from asking them.

"You seem desperately anxious to bring Mooreland's murderer to justice," he declared.

"Oh, I am!"

"But that wasn't your reason for coming here to-night?"

"No, not exactly. I came because— Oh, I suppose it was a sort of intuition. I was astounded

when you told me about the letter Mr. Marsh had dictated and about the instructions he had given you. I knew there was some deep purpose behind it, but I couldn't figure it out. Then, after you had gone, an idea popped in my mind. I saw it all in a flash, or thought I did. And so I rushed out here to warn you and prevent a murder."

"Murder?" he echoed.

"Yes, I felt certain Mr. Marsh meant to murder you. It seemed very clear then—horribly clear. But now—" Her voice faltered, and she gazed uncertainly about the room.

"But I had no intention of going to this place," he pointed out. "What led you to suppose that you would find me here?"

With a thoughtful frown, as if trying to collect a sequence of ideas, she glanced off into space.

"I don't know. I reasoned it all out, but it seems absurd now. If you knew all that I know, perhaps you would understand. Anyway, I was almost certain that, if Mr. Marsh meant to do you harm, the harm would be done here." She gave a nervous laugh. "As Mr. Stoddard remarked, it's a perfect setting for a murder. I supposed you would be held up on the way and enticed to this place somehow. My mind wasn't very clear on that point. It seemed—" She turned on him suddenly, with a startled look in her eyes. "And I was right!" she exclaimed. "You did come here!"

Their eyes met in an expression of mutual wonder. Yes, he reflected, she had been right, or very nearly right. He wondered by what process of reasoning,

or by what flash of intuition, she had divined Marsh's intention.

"How did it happen?" she asked.

He turned away, hesitated, listened to the roar of the storm, then faced her again. She had to know the gruesome truth very soon. It might as well be now.

"Mr. Marsh is dead," he said gently.

She stood stonily still, staring at him. Then she swayed a little, and he led her to the ramshackle sofa at the side of the room.

"Dead?" she echoed huskily. "Murdered?"

"Yes, and in the most curious way." As clearly as he could, he told her what had happened, beginning with Marsh's sudden and inexplicable appearance in the car and concluding with a description of the dramatic scene that had terminated in the mysterious death-thrust.

She sat very still when he had finished. Only her hands moved nervously.

"I should have driven straight back to Peekacre," he added, "but just then I saw a light over in this direction. I was seized with a wild idea that I might catch the murderer, and so I ran over."

"And you almost caught him," she said unthinkingly.

He gave a start and fixed her with a searching look.

"You think Stoddard is the murderer?"

"Oh, I shouldn't say that. I don't know. All I know is that he would be capable of almost any atrocity."

He turned away, and in his mind he ran over

the incredible things that had happened in the car.

"I doubt," he said huskily, "if any human being could have committed this murder in the way it was done."

She bowed her head in thought. He gazed down at the gleaming waves of brown that curved away from her forehead.

"I think we had better go," he murmured. "Your car is waiting, isn't it? I don't suppose you want to go back to the attic any more to-night?"

"The attic?" She shivered. "Oh, that was just an afterthought. When I didn't find you here, I supposed my suspicions had been wrong, and then I thought I might as well go up there and look around a bit."

"I see," he said, still gazing down at her head and wondering how many mysteries and secrets were contained there. As yet, she had given him only a few glimpses.

She rose. "Yes, let's go. I'm really dreadfully tired. Such excitement!"

She smiled wanly as he helped her into her raincoat. A brave, splendid girl, he reflected, and what a maze of terrors and mysteries she was moving in!

The storm had abated only a trifle. They stopped on the piazza steps, and he swept his flashlight over the soggy ground, but, in the downpour, they could see only a few feet ahead.

"Stoddard?" he muttered. During the past few minutes, the dark man had been almost forgotten. "Wonder which way he went."

They stared out along the misty path projected

by the flashlight. In the distance, trees were swaying and groaning, and it was disquieting to think that one of them might shelter an evilly disposed man with a pistol.

"I think he went away," said Theresa. "He happened to mention that he left his car in the garage."

"But we would have heard the noise of the engine," he pointed out.

"Not in this storm."

He swung the flashlight back and forth. For Theresa's sake he was anxious to guard against an attack from ambush. Presently, the moving beam picked out the dim contours of a tumble-down structure. The double doors stood wide open.

"The garage," she said. "And it's empty."

With a sigh of relief he took her arm and, bending against the gale, they walked out into the howling deluge. They had taken only a few steps when another troublesome thought occurred to him.

"Stoddard couldn't have got very far," he remarked. "My car is blocking the road a little way down the hill, and there isn't room to pass."

"But there are three roads. I have an idea Mr. Stoddard took one of the others."

They quickened their steps, although it seemed as if the wind were constantly pushing them back. She guided him to the narrow clearing, sheltered on one side by a clump of trees, where her car and chauffeur were waiting. All in all, he reflected, it was best that she should return with the chauffeur, although he should have preferred to have her beside himself in the sedan. But that, he decided, would be too gruesome an experience.

His swift glance at the chauffeur's face was reassuring. He felt the man could be trusted. But he searched the car thoroughly before he assisted her to her seat and made sure that the doors were securely locked. After the experience he had been through, he felt that he could not be too cautious. Then, after telling her that he would see her soon at Peekacre, he walked the short distance to where he had left his own car.

As he approached, he searched the soggy ruts for signs that another car had been through, but there were none. Evidently, Theresa had been right. Stoddard had gone away by one of the other roads. He opened the rear door and flashed his torch into the interior. The body had sagged a little deeper into the cushions, but otherwise the scene was exactly as he had left it. He shook his head slowly and shut his mind against a horde of perplexities. Then he took his seat at the wheel and started back.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAN IN THE LIBRARY

THE coach Theresa had borrowed from the obliging Mr. Carmody was not far behind when Harrington drove into the grounds of Peekacre. It swung up to the front entrance, the passenger alighted and went inside the house, and the coach drove away. In the meantime, Harrington put the sedan in the garage, and for a few moments he stood in perplexed contemplation of the lifeless form in the rear seat. The proper procedure, he understood, was to leave it there for the official inspection. Questions and mysteries thronged his mind as he turned away, carefully locked the garage door, and walked up to the house.

It was late, and a glance along the rambling stone and stucco structure showed only a few lights burning. Evidently the servants had retired. Harrington felt cold and wretched, and he would have preferred to step into dry clothes at once, but first he would have to notify the authorities. The telephone was in the library, and he hung his dripping raincoat on the rack in the hall and walked in.

He took but a few steps inside the room, then stood still and stared. Theresa was there, and her face told him at a glance that a disagreeable complication had set in. She was still in her green

raincoat and her small black hat, and her eyes were fixed with a look of dread and aversion on a man seated at the rosewood desk.

He was an undersized man, almost bald, with an unhealthy complexion, a sharp nose, and an unwholesome grin which exposed several gold teeth and was doubtless meant to be ingratiating.

"This gentleman says he is waiting for Mr. Marsh," Theresa explained.

At complete ease the caller leaned back in the tall chair in which Christopher Marsh had been accustomed to sit when he attended to his correspondence.

"My name is Tarkin—Samuel B. Tarkin," he announced importantly. "I'm here to see Mr. Marsh on private business."

"Who admitted you?" asked Harrington coldly.

"The butler. He knows me. I often call on Mr. Marsh. The butler said he might not return till late, so I said I would wait. Will he be back soon?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," Harrington declared, irritated by Tarkin's manner. "But I am Mr. Marsh's secretary, and you can state your business to me."

"Won't do," the little man declared, shaking his head.

Harrington scowled. He was anxious to telephone, but he did not care to do it in Tarkin's presence.

"I am not sure Mr. Marsh will return to-night," he said brusquely. "Hadn't you better come back in the morning?"

"*H'm,*" said Tarkin, and his unwholesome grin seemed to spread from his crooked mouth to his shrewd, rheumy eyes. "Mr. Marsh must have changed his habits, if he is staying out all night. Never knew him to do that before."

"Mr. Marsh's habits are his own concern. I really think you hadn't better wait. It is highly uncertain whether he will return to-night."

"Uncertain, eh?" Tarkin slanted his head to one side and gazed shrewdly at Harrington. "Well, life is a pretty uncertain proposition, isn't it? We never know, when we start out to go somewhere, whether we are coming back alive."

Harrington started and fixed the man in the chair with a sharper look. At first, he had been merely annoyed; now he regarded Tarkin with a new and apprehensive interest. Out of the corner of an eye, he caught a startled look on Theresa's face.

"You know, don't you," Tarkin pursued, "that Mr. Marsh will never again sit in this chair? It's too bad. It's a nice and comfortable chair."

Harrington walked slowly up to the desk and, leaning over it, looked straight into the man's shifty eyes.

"Just what do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"You heard what I said." Tarkin ran his finger appreciatively over the handsomely carved arm-rests of the chair. "It's a nice piece of furniture—much nicer than a coffin."

A gasp sounded at Harrington's side. Theresa had come up and stood staring tremulously at the man sitting in the chair.

"Oh, come to the point," Harrington snapped.

"No hurry, is there?" Tarkin giggled and rubbed his hands together. "You're Mr. Harrington, aren't you? Anyhow, that's what you call yourself. Names don't mean much these times. And the young lady, I think, is Miss Theresa Lanyard. It isn't her real name, but who cares?"

Harrington measured the little man with a look of stupefaction mingled with uneasiness. Tarkin appeared well-informed. His rheumy eyes glowed slyly as he saw what a sensation he had created.

"You talk like a man out of your senses," Harrington remarked. "You say yourself that names don't matter. Then why stress such an unimportant point?"

"Well, it's like this. Suppose Mr. Marsh should never come back. Suppose his dead body should turn up somewhere. Suppose he's been murdered. You know what would happen. The police would come around and ask a whole lot of questions. They would soon find out that you aren't Mr. Harrington and that the young lady isn't Miss Lanyard. They would want to know all about you. And they'd think it very curious that you two should have hired out to Mr. Marsh under phoney names. Wouldn't they now?"

Tarkin's watery eyes were very innocent as they travelled from one face to the other.

"Go on," said Harrington stiffly. "Miss Lanyard and I are both tired, but we will give you five minutes more."

"You will give me ten—maybe twenty. Now suppose it should turn out that Mr. Marsh had been afraid of you two who had hired out to him

under phoney names—that he'd got the idea into his head that you were after his life. Suppose the police found out that Marsh had been suspecting you of plotting his death. It wouldn't be so good, would it?"

Harrington's eyes narrowed. Tarkin's information appeared surprisingly complete and exact. He felt a quiver at his elbow, and his eyes met Theresa's.

"No, it wouldn't be so good," Tarkin repeated. "But it might be even worse. Suppose, for instance, that Mr. Marsh was murdered under your very nose, so to speak, and that you couldn't explain how it happened. The harder you tried to explain, the more convinced the police would be that you were lying. Pretty bad, eh, Mr. Harrington?"

"Appalling," Harrington dryly agreed. He was no longer wondering how Tarkin happened to be in possession of so much accurate information. For the moment, he was conscious of nothing but a fervid desire to pitch the man out the door. "So it's blackmail," he added.

"Right," said Tarkin. "Blackmail it is."

Harrington's eyes were full of contempt. His fingers worked convulsively. It would be a great satisfaction to throw the blackmailer squirming and squealing out of the house, but he resisted the temptation. Instead, he walked around to the end of the desk and picked up the telephone.

"What now?" asked Tarkin, his rheumy eyes blinking.

"You will see," said Harrington, jigging the hook.

"Better wait," Tarkin advised. "I'm not through yet. When I've finished, you may change your mind about calling the police. Just look at what I have here."

He dug his hand into his pocket and pulled out a small package. Harrington's thumb came to rest on the telephone hook. He watched tensely, and so did Theresa, while, with exasperating slowness, Tarkin unwrapped a little parcel. At length, a small grey glove appeared. With a gloating expression the little man held it up to the light, revealing several reddish smudges on the fingers.

"Crimson stains," he explained. "Not so good, eh?"

Theresa gave a shuddering gasp. Harrington gazed dazedly at the glove which Tarkin was holding between the tips of two fingers. It was evidently a woman's glove and, save for the stains, it looked as if it had not been worn long.

"Where did you find it?" Harrington asked.

"Not more than ten feet from the car you left in the road when you went to the old hotel."

"Oh," said Harrington dully. The scope of Tarkin's information was certainly astounding. "Then you were there?"

"I always try to be where I can pick up a piece of easy money."

Harrington gave him a contemptuous look. The man's brazenness was as amazing as his array of facts. The finding of the glove did not seem very important, however. It was only a minor item in a mystery that was inscrutable from beginning to end. What did a glove matter as long as it was

impossible to figure out how Marsh had got into the car or how the murder had been committed?

"Do I hear an offer?" asked Tarkin complacently.

Harrington, still holding the telephone, appeared to consider.

"An odd glove isn't worth much," he remarked. "I might offer you two dollars. I should say a pair could be bought for four. Don't you think so, Miss Lanyard?"

He glanced at her as he spoke, and he started as he saw the terrible whiteness of her face and the look of profound dread with which she stared at the glove held between Tarkin's finger-tips. For moments, he could not remove his eyes from her stricken face. It was as if he were witnessing a revelation that convulsed body and soul.

The blackmailer looked elatedly from Harrington to Theresa.

"Any more bids," he inquired, looking hopefully at the girl.

Harrington's eyes were still fixed on the white, agonized face. Then he looked down at her small, trembling hand, as if measuring it, and then, with equal intentness, at the glove. He nodded, and a look of tragic understanding entered his face.

"Better hurry" Tarkin advised. "To save time, let's begin with five thousand. Not a penny less."

"You contemptible rat!" Harrington muttered, looking longingly at the blackmailer's scrawny neck. "Where do you suppose a secretary and a nurse would find five thousand?"

"Secretary and nurse!" Tarkin giggled. "Say, that's good! But we're wasting time. And you

can't fool me. I know who you two are. It isn't going to hurt you to fork over a measly five thousand. I might ask more, and I'd get it, too, but I want to be reasonable. Well, do we close the deal?"

He moistened his lips with a satisfied air and looked expectantly at the other two.

"What do you say, Miss Lanyard?" asked Harrington gently. "Shall I give him the five thousand?"

She fixed her stricken eyes on the glove. She gasped for breath as if suffocating. Her eyes fell.

"Yes, please," she said faintly.

"That goes," Harrington declared, fixing Tarkin with a look of profound loathing. He reached into his pocket. "I'll give you a cheque for five thousand dollars and then——"

"No, I'll take the cash," the blackmailer declared. "Cheques aren't so good in this sort of business. And don't misunderstand me. I meant that I want five thousand from each of you. That makes ten. Even so, I'm letting you off easy. Now, if you——"

He broke off with a sharp squeal. Harrington had seized him by the throat, jerked the glove from his hand, and tossed it to Theresa, and now, transferring his grip from the man's throat to his collar, he dragged him toward the door. The blackmailer squirmed and kicked and whined, but to no avail. In the entrance hall, after opening the door, Harrington gave a vigorous heave, and the little man went hurtling into the darkness and swirling rain. A thud and a scream sounded as he landed on the soggy lawn.

"Not so good, eh, Tarkin?" Harrington called out, his feelings considerably relieved.

Back in the library, he found Theresa standing before the fireplace. The fire was almost out; all that remained was a smoulder and a glow in the ashes. Her slender figure drooping a little, she gazed as if fascinated at the charred and smoking mass. There was a faint reek in the air.

"*H'm,*" said Harrington, following her rigid gaze. "So Tarkin's ten thousand is going up in smoke."

"Yes," she said absently, "the laundry marks——"

"Oh, the laundry marks. He chuckled mirthlessly. "We might as well make a thorough job of it."

He took kindling from the fuel basket, watched it blaze up, then added a couple of logs. He watched her unsteadily, as if she were a long distance away.

"Better get up closer," he advised. "You are drenched. And you might as well remove that raincoat."

Mechanically, she took off the outer garment, and he drew up a chair close to the fire. For a time, he stood looking at her with the same far-off expression in his eyes.

"Wonder how Tarkin happened to know so much," he mumbled.

She continued to gaze into the fire as if she had not heard him. She shook her head listlessly when he offered a cigarette, and he lighted one for himself.

"Funny thing about that glove," he remarked. "I can think of no earthly reason why the person

wearing it should remove it and drop it so close to the—er—fatal spot. It seems like playing into the hands of fate."

She sat leaning forward in the chair, her face in her hands, while the firelight gleamed on her head. Now and then he looked at her queerly, with a grim smile on his lips.

"Curious scoundrel, that Tarkin. Didn't seem to know much about blackmailing technique. And he handled the glove very carelessly."

He looked down at the floor as if a particularly puzzling thought had come to him, then shrugged and paced up and down the room a few times.

"Anyhow," he muttered, "the person who committed the murder must be a magician. And Marsh must have been also." He paused beside her and looked down at her gleaming head with an uncertain expression. "I suppose, now that the evidence has been reduced to ashes, we might as well turn the majesty of the law loose on the case. We've delayed rather long."

He waited for her answer, which was only a slow nod, and then he stepped up to the table and consulted the telephone book. In a little while he had Mr. Whittaker, the district attorney, on the wire. When he had made his brief report he glanced about the room. For an instant, his eyes paused on the fireplace. He sniffed. There was a suspicious reek in the air.

"A bit stuffy in here," he observed. "Suppose we open the windows for a bit?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAW TAKES ITS COURSE

THE clock in the library had chimed the hour of two before Seneca Whittaker, the district attorney, arrived. With him he brought a little retinue consisting of Doctor Griffin, the county medical examiner, and two county detectives, Cunningham and Storm.

A long, rangy, dour man was Seneca Whittaker. He had a gentle face that made one think of a melancholy lamb, and his voice was soft and a little plaintive. He always walked and spoke as if he were in a sick-room. With the exception of the white vest he wore, his clothing was rather untidy and ill-fitting. The white, double-buttoned vest, however, was an immaculate and impressive thing. Whittaker was proud of it. He displayed it whenever he could by the simple expedient of pushing his coat to the sides and thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets.

Doctor Griffin and the two detectives were all incredulity while Harrington told his story. Occasionally, the former snickered contemptuously, while the latter exchanged meaningful glances. Harrington himself felt at times as if his recital of facts merited nothing but disbelief. It was difficult to maintain a calm voice while he told of Marsh's sudden and inexplicable appearance in the sedan and the equally

sudden and inexplicable murder. Whittaker, however, looked as if he were of the firm opinion that this was a world of melodrama in which almost anything might happen.

Toward the end of Harrington's story, he got up from his chair, displayed his ornamental vest to full advantage, and sauntered over to one of the windows. The storm had dwindled down to a slow drizzle and a fitful moan of wind. Whittaker looked down at the rug at his feet, and then he stooped and touched it briefly. He waited until Harrington had finished, and then he walked over to the opposite window and went through the same performance.

"You've had the windows open, I see," he observed. "It's been raining in. There's quite a pool on the windward side."

Harrington gaped at him. It seemed an absurdly irrelevant observation for Whittaker to make after listening to such an amazing story. He recalled, however, that he had opened the windows to clear the room of the odours of the burned glove.

"Yes, I opened them," he said. "The room needed an airing."

"Did it?" asked Whittaker, regarding him sluggishly. "Let's see, the wind died down suddenly at midnight. Not much rain could have blown in after that. You didn't get back till about half past eleven, you tell me. Then you must have opened the windows between half past eleven and midnight."

Harrington nodded vaguely and sought Theresa's eyes.

"Weren't you cold?" asked Whittaker. "You had just come in from a long drive in the storm."

Harrington gave a little start. He was just beginning to perceive the drift of Whittaker's remarks.

"The fire was smoking," he casually explained. "It's better to freeze than to suffocate."

"Oh, smoking, eh?" Whittaker turned his melancholy eyes on the fireplace. "Wonder what made it smoke. It isn't smoking now."

While Harrington watched him with a growing tension Whittaker walked up to the fireplace and looked down at the hearthstone. His head drooped lower and lower from his shoulders. Harrington, tracing his downward gaze, saw that there were particles of dried mud on the hearthstone.

"Now, that's queer." Whittaker gave a mirthless chuckle. "If a fire had been burning, nobody could have stood as close as this without getting scorched. If there was no fire, what was the sense in standing up close?"

Harrington stole a glance in Theresa's direction. He saw a look of vague alarm on her face. Whittaker, it seemed, was gradually approaching a ticklish point. Harrington recalled that he had built up the fire after Theresa had thrown the glove on the glowing ashes.

"Now, I wonder what made the smoke," Whittaker said again in his gentle, plaintive voice. And then, while two pairs of eyes in the room watched him anxiously, he took the poker, pushed back the burning log, and proceeded to rake the embers and ashes. It was a tedious task, but Whittaker was a patient man. At length, he dragged a small object out on the hearthstone.

"Too hot to touch," he said, but he tapped the

little object with the poker, knocking off the coating of ash. "Why, it's a button! What kind of button, I wonder? Too small for a vest and not the right shape for a shirt." He got down on his knees and inspected his find closely. "It's from a glove," he declared. "A lady's glove, I should say. And there's a trademark on it. Well, we'll just let it cool off."

He got up, spread his coat apart, exhibiting his vest, and fixed a gentle, quizzical look on Harrington and Theresa.

"All right, doc. We'll have a look at the body. You watch this button, Cunningham. You take a run through the house, Storm. Better come along Mr. Harrington. I think Miss Lanyard needs a rest."

The three, led by Harrington, went out to the garage. Harrington unlocked and opened the door and switched on the electric light, then stood aside while Whittaker walked slowly around the sedan, inspecting each door and window.

"You say these doors and windows were locked?" he questioned.

"All the windows were closed, and three of the doors were locked from the inside. The front door on the right was closed but not locked."

"And you were going thirty-five miles an hour?"

"Between thirty-five and forty."

In his sluggish manner, Whittaker inspected the arrangement of the doors.

"Nice little problem," he commented. "Since the front door on the right was the only one that wasn't locked Marsh must have got into the car that way."

"But I would have seen him," Harrington protested. "Besides, how could a man get into a car travelling over thirty-five miles an hour?"

"I don't know," Whittaker confessed with a sigh. "All I know is what you told me. You said Marsh appeared in the rear seat after you had been going about three quarters of an hour. To appear there, he had to get in somehow, and there's only one way he could have got in."

"But that's an impossible way."

"Trying to prove yourself a liar, Mr. Harrington?" Whittaker chuckled in his dreary way. "Well, how Marsh got in isn't any more mysterious than how the murderer got at him. All right, doc, do your stuff."

Doctor Griffin opened the rear door and looked in at the gruesomely twisted figure in the corner.

"I need more light than that," he declared.

Whittaker looked around and his eyes fixed on a work bench littered with tools of all descriptions. With Harrington's assistance he cleared off the bench, and then, by the combined efforts of the three men, the body was lifted from the car and placed upon it.

"Now," said Whittaker, while the examiner went about his task, "please sit down at the wheel, just as you were when you first saw Marsh in the car."

Harrington climbed into the front seat, gripped the wheel, and fixed his eyes on the rear-view mirror. Soon he saw Whittaker's dour face reflected in the glass.

"Is this how Marsh sat?" the prosecutor inquired.

"Just a little more toward the centre."

Whittaker edged over. "Now tell me again what happened."

"We were going down a hill. When we reached the bottom, I started to apply the brakes, but they weren't working well. I knew that wasn't the right road, and I didn't like the looks of things, anyway, so I stopped the car as soon as I could. We had an argument and Marsh suddenly pulled a pistol on me."

"You saw the pistol in the mirror?"

"I did. I saw Marsh's face, too. He looked as if he actually meant to kill me. Oh, yes, I saw murder in his face. And I had no desire to die just then, so I went on and turned to the left."

"That's the old, narrow road that leads to the Hilltop View Hotel?"

"It is, but I didn't know it then. Looking in the mirror, I saw Marsh leaning back and smoking a cigar as if he were actually enjoying himself. I surmised he meant to kill me, and I was only playing for time. We reached the top of the hill, and Marsh ordered me to stop. He asked me if I didn't think it was a good place to die, and then he said he was going to kill me."

"Why did he want to kill you?"

"Oh, he had an absurd obsession that I was after his life. He was pressing the pistol against my spine, and I expected every moment to be my last. The only hope I could see was to jump for my life, and I doubted if I could jump fast enough. It seemed I would stand a better chance if I could give

him a jolt of some sort and distract his mind for a moment. And so, all of a sudden I turned around and——"

"Show me," said Whittaker.

Harrington changed from narrative to pantomime. He swung around in the seat and faced the man sitting behind him.

"Then I asked him why he killed David Mooreland."

The prosecutor's face went blank for a moment.

"Oh, you asked him why he killed David Mooreland. Did you have any reason for asking him that?"

"Oh, yes, I did. But even if I hadn't had any reason whatever, the way he looked at me at that moment was proof enough. I never saw such a look of guilt in my life. I almost forgot to jump. And then—" Harrington's voice wavered—"then it happened."

"While you were still turned around in your seat and facing him?"

"Yes, just as I am facing you now. Marsh died before my eyes. First his face convulsed in the most horrible manner. Then his eyes grew round and glassy. He heaved forward, uttered an awful scream, and then his head slumped down on his chest. He was dead in a few minutes."

Whittaker inclined his head and meditated gloomily.

"You didn't see anything of the murderer?"

"Nothing whatever."

"You saw no weapon, no hand reaching out, or anything of that sort?"

Harrington shook his head. Again he had an embarrassing feeling that he had told an incredible thing. He wondered why Whittaker did not denounce him as a liar. Yet, even now, the death scene was horribly real and vivid in his mind.

"Tell me," said Whittaker, "did you have any idea as to whether Marsh was struck from the side or from the back?"

"From the back, I should say," after a moment's reflection. "That's only a hazy impression though. I didn't see the blow struck. All I saw was how Marsh reacted to it."

Whittaker fixed him with a long, sluggish look. Over at the bench, the examiner was muttering to himself as he went about his task. Now Whittaker turned and inspected the window in the rear, running his fingers over it and pressing against it to make sure that it was securely fastened.

"No answer here," he announced.

"Or anywhere else, I fear," said Harrington.

Whittaker switched on the light in the roof of the car, and then, finding it insufficient, swept the interior with his flashlight. He made a careful search of the seat, its upholstery appallingly smeared in places, then turned his attention to the floor.

"Did Marsh wear a hat?" he suddenly inquired.

Harrington stared at him. It seemed an utterly pointless question, but he recalled now that Marsh had been bareheaded. Even now, in imagination, he could see, in the dusky interior of the car, Marsh's bald head and malevolent face.

"Bareheaded, eh?" Whittaker echoed in his gentle, plaintive voice. "That's queer. I must ask

Storm what he thinks about that. Storm has the right kind of brains for this sort of job. Well, doc?"

Doctor Griffin had turned away from his inspection of the body. He scratched his chin reflectively.

"I don't like to state a definite opinion without a more thorough examination, but I should say the jugular vein had been cut at the point where it joins the subclavian vein."

"What sort of weapon?"

"A very slender instrument, I should say. It might have been done with an ice pick."

"Could Marsh have possibly killed himself?"

Harrington shook his head at the question. Such an idea was utterly at variance with what he had witnessed.

"If he had, there would be a weapon in the car, wouldn't there?" murmured Doctor Griffin. "Under the circumstances, as Mr. Harrington has stated them, it would have been impossible for Marsh to throw the weapon away after stabbing himself. But he didn't stab himself. This wound wasn't self-inflicted. I'd stake my reputation on that."

"That's out then," Whittaker observed. "We know now that it's a case of murder. All we want to know now is who did it, and how. Maybe Storm can figure it out." He leaned his long rangy body against the side of the car and pondered. "By the way, Mr. Harrington, what kind of cigars did Mr. Marsh smoke?"

"Cigars?" Harrington peered at him bewilderedly. It seemed another pointless question. "He smoked a brand called Cuban Queen."

"Expensive, aren't they? About three for a dollar?"

"I believe so. Yes, Marsh had expensive tastes in cigars."

"And you say he lighted one as you started up the hill after you had taken the left turn. Tell me, was he still smoking it when you stopped on the top then?"

Harrington's mind went back over the tense moments.

"I believe so. I couldn't be positive, though. I was too excited to notice such details."

Whittaker nodded understandingly. "Anyway, the cigar must have dropped from his mouth when he was stabbed. Here it is." He reached inside the car, picked up something, and exhibited a partly-smoked cigar. The band was partly charred, but the name was still legible. He passed the fragment to Harrington. "Queer, eh?"

Harrington studied the brand for a moment.

"'Okay'," he read, his brows puckering.

"It's a puzzle," said Whittaker. "Okay is a cheap cigar. You can buy them three for a quarter. Quite a come-down for a man used to the best. I wonder why Mr. Marsh smoked good cigars all his life and smoked a cheap one the day he was murdered. Maybe Storm can figure it out. Storm has brains. Here he comes now."

CHAPTER IX

TRACKS IN THE MUD

THE garage door opened and Storm, a thick-set, flint-jawed man with shrewd eyes beneath beetling brows, walked in and reported that he had gone through the house but had found nothing of interest.

"Well, there are a few interesting things here," Whittaker told him. "I want your opinion on them, Storm. First, Mr. Harrington here tells me Marsh was bareheaded. What do you make of that?"

The detective's brows contracted.

"He wasn't in the habit of going out bareheaded, was he? Some men think it makes the hair grow."

"No," said Harrington. "I have been here three weeks, and I never saw him go out without his hat."

"There was quite a gale. Maybe it blew off."

"It couldn't have blown off after he got into the car. The windows and doors were closed."

Storm bit hard into the cigar he was smoking.

"Well, then I should say that, when he started out, he had no idea of going anywhere. Maybe he just stepped out on the porch to look at the weather, and then he saw or heard something that called him away from the house, and then——"

"I have reason to believe," Harrington cut in, "that he started out for the post office in the village."

Storm looked nonplussed and stared at his cigar. Whittaker's gloomy eyes travelled to the bench where the body lay.

"Marsh was short and thick," he pointed out, apparently apropos of nothing. "About your size, Storm."

Storm did not appear to see the point of the suggestion. Whittaker's eyes went from the bench to the rear of the car.

"This car has a high back window—higher than most," he observed. "Even so, Marsh's head, when he sat erect, would hardly touch it. Of course, with his hat on——"

He paused and looked hopefully at Storm, but the detective was still puzzled.

"It seems Marsh was afraid for his life—expected somebody to take a pot shot at him or something," Whittaker added.

Storm drew up his head. "I've got it! With his hat on, Marsh could be seen by anybody who chanced to glance at the rear window. But he couldn't be seen with his hat off."

"See?" said Whittaker solemnly, nodding in Harrington's direction. "I knew Storm would hit it. Storm has brains. Of course, Marsh could have pulled down the back curtain or put his hat beside him on the seat, but a man doesn't always think of such simple things. Now, here's another hard one, Storm. Marsh was in the habit of smoking good cigars, but he smoked a cheap one on this trip—a three-for-a-quarter. Here is what's left of it. I found it inside the car. How come?"

With a shrewd expression, Storm studied the frag-

ment. He meditated for a long time, while Whittaker gazed at him expectantly out of his dour eyes.

"I suppose a poor cigar is better than none," Whittaker suggested after a long wait.

Storm looked up, and his eyes indicated that he was on the track of an idea.

"So if a man can't find his favourite brand," Whittaker went on after a while, "he'll take any brand he can get."

A grin broke out on Storm's face.

"I think I've got it," he said proudly. "Between the time he left the house and the time he turned up in the car, Marsh was in a place that sold cigars, but not his favourite brand, and so he bought what he could get."

Whittaker appeared to consider the idea.

"I believe Storm is right," he told Harrington. "I don't know what I'd do without Storm's brain. You give him a problem, and he'll give you the solution before you can bat an eye."

"And now," said Storm importantly, "all we've got to do is to find a place in the neighbourhood that sells the Okay but does not sell Marsh's own brand, and we'll know something about his movements before the tragedy."

"Why, of course," said Whittaker admiringly. "I'd never have thought of that. I'm lucky to have a brainy man on my staff. We'll do that very thing." He glanced dejectedly at the car. "But first it might be a good idea to try to discover how Marsh got into the car and how the murderer got at him. We'll tackle the first part of the problem first. How did Marsh get in? Mr. Harrington,

would you mind sitting down at the wheel again? I want to reconstruct the scene."

Harrington complied, and Whittaker saw that all the windows were closed, then turned up the inside handles on the two rear doors and the left front door and slammed them shut. The right front door, which had a special lock, he merely closed.

"There you are, Storm. Imagine the car going over thirty-five miles an hour. How did Marsh get in?"

Storm walked slowly around the car, scrutinizing every detail of the arrangement of doors and windows. He paused before the right front door.

"I've seen people in the movies jump from one moving car to another," he remarked, "but it looked phoney to me. If Marsh did that—" He gave an incredulous laugh. "But Marsh couldn't do such a thing."

"But suppose he did?" Whittaker prompted.

"It's supposing the impossible. But, if he did, he must have landed on the running-board and got in through this door. There was no other way he could get in. And it's a sure thing he couldn't have got in this way without Mr. Harrington seeing him. No, that's out. It couldn't happen in a million years."

"Well, what then?"

Storm walked around to the rear, tested the back window, shook the spare tyre and, standing on the bumperette, looked out over the top.

"The window is tight," he said. "Anyhow, no grown man could squeeze through. The top hasn't been tampered with. Couldn't be done, anyhow,

without the driver noticing it. No, sir, I see no way Marsh could have got inside this car."

"But he did get in, and it seems the murderer did too."

Storm shook his head and confessed that the problem was too deep for him. Whittaker looked disappointed.

"Have you no idea whatsoever, Storm?"

"Yes, I have. One of two things happened. Either Marsh was in the car when it started, or else Mr. Harrington has been lying to us. I wouldn't be too sure about that goof."

He spoke in a confidential undertone that was inaudible to Harrington, sitting behind closed doors and windows. Whittaker walked around to the right front door and opened it.

"Storm says he is stumped," he announced.

"So am I," said Harrington, climbing down from the seat.

"Storm thinks," Whittaker added, "that either Marsh was in the car all the time, or else you have been spoofing us."

Harrington shrugged. "Oh, I expected that."

"Did you stop anywhere along the road?" Storm asked.

"Only at the garage. I had to leave the battery to be recharged, and the man—I believe his name is Luke Garbo—gave me another battery to use in the meantime."

Storm fixed him with a hard and suspicious gaze.

"I know Luke Garbo," he said. "A little queer, but a first-class mechanic." He paused for a moment, and glanced at the car. "By the way, the battery

of a car of this make is in the back, isn't it, Harrington?"

"Yes, under the rear footboard."

"So if Marsh was hiding in the car when you drove away from Peekacre—and that's a hard *if* to swallow—Luke Garbo would have found him when he changed the battery."

"He would," said Harrington with conviction, "and I'm sure I would have seen him. No, I don't think you will find the solution there."

"I'm afraid we won't find it anywhere else," was Whittaker's gloomy remark. "Did you get out of the car while Garbo worked on it?"

"No, I sat at the wheel all the time, but I looked back occasionally. I'm sure there wasn't another human being about."

"How can you be sure? Did you look around?"

"Oh, I suppose I did, in an abstracted sort of way. Several curious things had happened, and I had a lot of things on my mind."

"So it's possible, isn't it," Whittaker suggested, "that Marsh slipped into the car after Garbo had finished his work and gone inside?"

Harrington tried to recall all the details of his brief stop at Garbo's garage. He shook his head.

"Why should Marsh do that? Besides, I'm sure he didn't. I remember now that Garbo himself closed the rear doors. He remarked there was a storm coming. Garbo is a melancholy individual. He remained standing as I drove off, and I heard him say something to himself about being here to-day and gone to-morrow."

"Yes," said Storm, "that's one of his favourite bright cracks." He gazed darkly and narrowly at Harrington. "Well, this is how it looks to me. The only place where Marsh could have slipped into the car was at Garbo's garage. It couldn't have happened anywhere else."

"And it didn't happen there," said Harrington with emphasis. "I didn't see him until three quarters of an hour later."

Storm fixed him with a gaze that was frankly incredulous.

"Let's hear what Garbo has to say," Whittaker suggested. "We might go over there now."

Harrington started the engine, and the two other men climbed into the rear seat. It was but a short run to the crossroads where Garbo's little garage was situated. Soon the headlights picked out a low and murky brick building with two regulation petrol pumps in front.

"Let's stop here," said Whittaker when they were about a hundred yards distant. "I want to look at something."

Harrington stopped, and they proceeded afoot through the gentle drizzle. Whittaker pulled out his flashlight and inspected the ground as they moved along.

"I don't suppose Garbo's business is very lively," he conjected. "It wouldn't be in a locality like this."

"It isn't," Storm affirmed. "The new State road just about ruined him."

Whittaker swept his flashlight back and forth as if looking for something on the soggy ground.

"Then it's just possible that he hasn't had a customer since Mr. Harrington drove away. Don't you think so, Storm?"

"Why, yes, it's possible enough. Sometimes he hasn't more than a customer or two a day."

"And it started to rain just before Mr. Harrington drew up. That helps. Now—what's this?"

He stopped and trained the flashlight straight down. The moist ground showed a number of indentations extending in two long lines.

"Tyre marks," said Harrington. He bent over and studied the marks carefully. "These were made by Marsh's sedan. Mr. Marsh had a new set of tyres put on last week. That's why the marks show so plainly."

Whittaker's flashlight made a long, circular sweep. "And they are the only fresh marks I can see," he declared. "Let's move on."

They followed the two tracks until they came to a point where the surface had been cluttered up by footsteps on one side.

"This is where I stopped," Harrington explained. "Here you can see where Garbo stamped back and forth while he worked."

Whittaker focused his light on the muddled cluster of footprints. They occupied a narrow space, and from them extended several straight lines reaching to the garage and back.

"Let's see," said Whittaker. "I suppose Garbo came out to see what was the trouble, and then he had to go back and fetch the other battery. And this is where he worked." Again he looked down at the conglomeration of footprints. "The

imprints are all in one group, and they are all on one side of the tracks. Now let me find a clear one."

He picked out a clear print and measured it carefully with a small collapsible gauge. Then he straightened up and looked around.

"Now, if somebody sneaked into the car while Garbo and Mr. Harrington weren't looking, there surely ought to be another set of footprints somewhere close by."

They searched carefully, but the only fresh prints were those made by the tyres and by Garbo himself. All the other depressions in the ground were old and shapeless, showing that they had been made before the rain set in. Whittaker looked at his assistant as if hoping for a bright suggestion, but none came.

"I'm stumped," Storm confessed. "It's a dead-sure thing that Marsh didn't get into the car here. Or anywhere else, for that matter," he added, fixing a dark look on Harrington.

Harrington smiled. "Think I'm lying, Storm?"

The detective did not answer, but his studied silence spoke an emphatic yes. Making long sweeps with his flashlight, Whittaker studied the several lines of footprints extending between the garage and the point where the sedan had stood.

The tracks overlapped or crossed one another in places. Whittaker seemed vaguely troubled.

"One—two—three—four—five," he counted. "Garbo made three trips from the garage to the car, and two from the car to the garage. Queer, isn't it, Storm? What do you make of it?"

Storm looked at the five tracks, all converging in the much-trampled spot where the car had stood, and shook his head.

"I—I don't get the point, sir."

"Well, let's see. Garbo walks from the garage to the car to see what's the trouble. Then he goes back to the garage for the new battery. Then he carries the new battery back to the car and installs it. And then, it would seem, he carries the old battery back to the garage, and returns to the car once more to see his customer off and make sure that the car is starting all right. And then— But I think that's all. There aren't any more tracks to account for."

Harrington felt a quiver of sudden excitement. Storm stood stonily still for a moment, gazing rigidly at the tracks, and then his sturdy shoulders jerked upward.

"Holy smoke!" he exclaimed. "According to that, Garbo never went back to the garage."

"I believe you are right," said Whittaker, as if the thought had just now occurred to him. "That's what I call brain work, Storm. No, since there are three tracks from the garage to the car, and only two in the other direction, Garbo couldn't have gone back to the garage."

"But where did he go?" Storm demanded after a long pause.

"Nowhere, it seems, unless he went straight up. Let's go in and ask him."

CHAPTER X

A PURCHASE OF CIGARS

OWING to the lateness of the hour, it took a great deal of pounding to arouse the garage proprietor, who lived in the rear of his business establishment. At length, a light fell through a window, then came the sound of a bolt being withdrawn, and finally Luke Garbo, only half-dressed, showed a sleepy face at the door.

"Want gas?"

"No," said Whittaker, his gloomy eyes making a comprehensive sweep of the office and noting a little refreshment and tobacco counter at one side. "We want a nice smoke."

Garbo rubbed his eyes and went behind the counter, apparently not sufficiently awake as yet to think it strange that he should have been aroused in the dead of night to satisfy such a trifling requirement.

"What kind do you want?" he asked with a yawn.

"Cuban Queen."

"Sorry, but I ain't got that one." Garbo opened his little show case, containing a modest stock of only three or four brands. "But here's a right nice smoke."

He held out a box, and Whittaker took a cigar

and inspected the label. "'Okay'," he read. "All right, we'll try it. Have one, Mr. Harrington? Help yourself, Storm."

Each man took a cigar and lighted it, and Garbo returned the box to the case. He was fully awake now, and he fixed a look of pleased surprise on Mr. Storm.

"Why, hello, Mr. Storm. Didn't recognize you at first. Travellin' pretty late, ain't you?"

"Business," said Storm briefly. "Here's somebody else I think you know." He indicated Harrington.

The two men looked at each other. Without his mechanic's cap, and with the grease removed from his face, Garbo seemed quite a different man from the individual in oil-spattered overalls who had attended to the sedan.

"Why, of course!" he exclaimed. "You're the gentleman who came here yesterday in Mr. Marsh's car. Did she run all right?"

"Splendidly," Harrington assured him.

"And this," Storm proceeded with the introductions, "is Mr. Whittaker, the district attorney."

Garbo seemed quite impressed.

"How is business?" Whittaker inquired pleasantly.

"Rotten. That new State road has taken all my trade away. You don't happen to know anybody who wants to buy a nice little garage?"

"I can't think of anybody just at present." Whittaker looked appreciatively at his cigar. "Nice smoke. Sell many of this brand?"

"Just a few." Garbo heaved a dolorous sigh. "I don't sell much of anything. Most of the people

who stop here want only oil or water, and they ain't much profit in them things."

"No, I suppose not. You didn't happen to sell one of these cigars yesterday?"

Garbo looked as if he thought the question rather odd. After a moment's thought, he shook his head.

"Try to remember, Mr. Garbo. Didn't some-one come in and ask for Cuban Queen and then, when he found you didn't have it, buy one of these instead?"

"No," said Garbo, a ponderous look in his honest eyes. "I didn't sell no cigars yesterday. Business was worse than usual, and that's sayin' a mouthful. Why, I had only one customer all day, and that was this gentleman here."

There was an exchange of furtive glances between Whittaker and Storm.

"We want to ask you about that," said the latter. "Remember how many trips you made between the garage and the car while Mr. Harrington was here?"

This time Garbo looked both uneasy and mystified.

"Say, what's up? You're askin' some queer questions." He swallowed hard, and a look of alarm came into his worried face. "Anybody dead?"

"Why should you suppose that?"

"I'm not supposin', but life is uncertain. We're here to-day and gone to-morrow."

"Well, we're here now, anyhow," said Storm practically. "Now think hard. How many trips did you make?"

Garbo considered, but his mind seemed to be on the question itself rather than the answer.

"Oh, I guess about three or four."

"There are tracks outside," Storm told him, "that show you made three trips from the garage to the car, and only two in the other direction."

Garbo gaped uncomprehendingly, and then a look of astonishment came into his broad face.

"Why, that can't be. Three trips out and two in? If that was so, then I'd be standing out there now."

"You certainly would, Garbo."

The man looked acutely puzzled, and it seemed to Harrington that his perplexity was genuine. For that matter, the discrepancy as to the tracks was only an added complication. It did not explain how Marsh had got into the car or how he had been killed.

"I don't get it," Garbo confessed. "No-siree, I don't get it a-tall. Must be a mistake somewhere."

Storm seemed inclined to press the point further, but Whittaker forestalled him with a question.

"You didn't see anything of Mr. Marsh yesterday?"

"Mr. Marsh? No, I ain't seen him since last Thursday, that was almost a week ago."

"Just one more question, Garbo, and then we'll let you go back to bed." Whittaker pulled thoughtfully on his cigar. "Was there anyone else about when you worked on Mr. Marsh's car?"

"No, sir. Not a soul."

"Would it have been possible for anybody to slip into the car unnoticed by you and Mr. Harrington?"

"Eh?" Stark amazement gathered in Garbo's eyes. "Say, what in the name of Sam Hill——"

"Will you please answer my question, Garbo?"

The man heaved a long breath.

"How could anybody slip in when they wasn't nobody around? It couldn't be done, anyhow. I closed the doors myself just as Mr. Harrington started up the engine, and I happened to look inside. No, sir, they was nobody in that car but Mr. Harrington. I could take oath on that."

Whittaker smiled as if entirely satisfied.

"Thanks, Garbo. We won't bother you any more. Too bad about Mr. Marsh, wasn't it?"

The man started, then stood rigid, staring, with eyelids fluttering.

"Eh? What—what are you sayin' about Mr. Marsh?"

"He is dead—murdered."

Garbo stood stonily still. Only his lips and Adam's-apple worked.

"Murdered!" he exclaimed huskily. He swallowed with difficulty. "And only yesterday I was sayin' that he didn't look as if he was long for this world. Here to-day and gone to-morrow. That's how it goes. Who done it?"

"That's what we are trying to find out. Good night, Mr. Garbo."

He walked out, followed by Harrington and Storm, the latter giving the garage keeper a long, dark glance in parting.

"I don't like that goof," he declared when they were outside. "Something queer about him. And

it's funny that he stocks Okay cigars but not Cuban Queen."

"Think so?" sighed Whittaker mildly. "Well, maybe you are right. It strikes me, though, that you may find a good many places within forty miles of here that sell only cheap cigars. A cigar like Cuban Queen would go stale on Garbo's hands, and that would mean quite a loss."

Whittaker stopped a few steps from the garage and swung his torch over the footprints and tyre tracks.

"And you had him up a tree about these tracks," Storm pointed out. "You knocked him dumb."

Whittaker reflected while he slowly moved his torch over the maze of markings.

"Oh, not up a tree exactly. He was simply puzzled, and he was puzzled like an honest man. A dishonest man would have tried to brazen out of it and lie. Garbo didn't do that."

"Because he couldn't think of a lie quick enough."

"Think so, Storm? If Garbo had anything to do with the murder, he is a very clever man, and a clever man would have come right back at me with a good lie. For instance," and Whittaker flashed his torch on the rear end of the sedan, "Garbo might have told us that, just as Mr. Harrington started the car, he jumped on to the rear bumper and rode a little way, jumping off just before the car picked up speed."

"He might, but he would have to explain why he did it."

"Maybe the spare tyre chain was dragging, or maybe the rear licence tag had come loose, so Garbo hopped on and fixed it while the car was running. Or maybe he had an errand at that little shack where the driveway comes out on the main road and decided he might as well hop on and ride. You see, a clever man, if dishonest, would have been able to think of several explanations."

"But, even so, he had to return to the garage, and he couldn't do that without leaving tracks."

"Let's see." Whittaker made a wide arc with his torch. "See how the road swings out in a half-circle? If Garbo rode to the little shack, for instance, he would have made a short cut, and that would have brought him around by the hard gravel path to the other side of the house. You see, a clever man could have lied out of it. Doesn't it strike you that way, Storm?"

"Well, he might," was the grudging admission.

"And, anyway," said Whittaker, "this doesn't explain how Marsh got into the car or how the murderer got at him."

They piled into the sedan, and Harrington drove back through the early morning drizzle. As they approached the house, a single light, surrounded by a wet stucco surface, stabbed the darkness. He thought of Theresa, waiting in the library, and of the glove of which nothing now remained but a button. And then, by a circuitous route, his thoughts went to the strange and almost forgotten letter which was still in his pocket.

The two officials alighted at the door, and he drove the car into the garage. He was almost

certain he had left the light burning, yet the building was dark. As the glare of the headlights illuminated the interior, he cast a swift, involuntary glance at the gruesome figure stretched out on the bench. He shut off the motor, mechanically reached out his hand to switch off the headlights, but something checked him—a swift, furtive movement alongside a number of packing cases stored in the rear.

For a moment he sat rigid, watching. Then, leaving the headlights on, he alighted. Marsh's pistol was still in his pocket, and his hand moved toward it as he went to the rear. Now he could detect neither sound nor movement, but a brief glimpse of an undersized scurrying figure lingered most vividly in his mind.

He stood in front of the tier of packing cases, listening. All he heard was the patter of rain on trees outside. Suddenly, he reached out and jerked the tier aside, then grabbed a squirming and whimpering individual by the coat collar and pulled him out into the sharp light of the headlights.

An exclamation of surprise and disgust broke from his lips.

It was Samuel B. Tarkin, the blackmailer.

CHAPTER XI

THE GLOVE BUTTON

Seeing that he was cornered, the man grinned ingratiatingly, exhibiting several gold teeth. Harrington shook him vigorously, making his bald head waggle as if insecurely attached to his spine. There was a scratch across his cheek, and he looked thoroughly dishevelled.

"Oh, still here, Tarkin? What are you up to now?"

"Stop shaking me," the little man whined, his face looking doubly unwholesome in the glare of the headlights. "How can I talk if you dislocate my jaw?"

"Make it short," Harrington advised, jerking him out on the floor. "What are you doing here?"

Tarkin pulled himself together and arranged his rumpled clothing. Out of the corner of a rheumy eye, he glanced at the dead man on the bench.

"Now look here. No use being rough. You don't like me. You want to wring my neck. That's all right. I'm used to it. You see, I'm not what you might call a popular sort of person. Just the same, you like Miss Lanyard, don't you? A bit sweet on her, eh? Of course, that isn't her name, but——"

"Shut up!" Harrington growled. Again he reached for Tarkin's neck, but the little man scuttled

away. "Well, if you have anything to say, come to the point."

"I've got lots to say, and you'd better listen." Tarkin assumed an important mien. "Don't you know you and Miss Lanyard are in a tight fix? Oh, I know you burned the glove. But there is still the button, and the police are good at identifying buttons. Not so good, eh?"

"Well?" Harrington demanded, recalling that Whittaker had detailed one of his two assistants to watch the button during his absence. That had been only a subterfuge, of course. The button could have been cooled off in water and consigned to a safe pocket. In reality, it was Theresa Lanyard that Cunningham had been set to watch.

Tarkin giggled and put his hand in his vest pocket.

"Suppose I should tell you I've got the button here? Now, don't get rough. If you do, I'll holler, and then the deal's off."

Despite his sense of loathing, Harrington gazed curiously at the little blackmailer.

"There isn't going to be any deal," he declared. "A button isn't so easily identified. Furthermore, I don't believe you have it. I saw it last on the stone in front of the fireplace, and Cunningham was watching it."

"Yes, but he was watching Miss Lanyard, too. And then Miss Lanyard went off to powder her nose, and she didn't come back, and, after a bit, Cunningham got nervous about her. He went to look for her, forgetting the button. And then—Well, just look at this."

With a self-satisfied chuckle, Tarkin drew his hand away from his vest pocket and carefully exhibited the glove button.

"What am I bid?" he inquired. "Remember, no rough stuff, or I'll yell at the top of my voice, and that won't be so good. How much?"

"A good, sound kick." Harrington's hand inspired by a sickening disgust, moved quickly and seized Tarkin by the throat, choking off an outcry. With his other hand, he pried the blackmailer's fist open, dislodged the button, and then a vigorous kick sent the little man spinning across the floor.

"Now get out of my sight," he snapped.

With whimpers and grunts, the man steadied himself. His rheumy eyes glared banefully.

"You'll be sorry for that," he snarled.

"Get out," said Harrington thickly, dropping the button into his pocket, "or I may forget that you are only a puny, disgusting rat."

"All right," said Tarkin sullenly. "I'll go, but you'll be sorry. The button isn't everything. I'd let you have it cheap. There are other things. What about the letter Marsh wrote yesterday?"

Harrington stared for a moment, again marvelling at the scope of the man's information. Instinctively, his hand went toward his inside breast pocket.

"Not so good, eh?" Tarkin, misinterpreting his expression, giggled in spiteful glee. "I know all about that letter. It'd make interesting reading for Whittaker, and it'd make things look pretty bad for you and Miss Lanyard. Both of you are in deep even now. But the letter——"

"The letter," Harrington interrupted, restraining himself with difficulty, "was mailed yesterday by Mr. Marsh, and Whittaker will have it in the morning."

"That's where you're wrong. Maybe Marsh meant to mail it, but he didn't." The blackmailer's eyes slanted toward the body on the bench. "It was in his pocket until a little while ago."

Harrington gazed narrowly into his unwholesome face. Tarkin's information seemed to encompass a great many things. It was possible that he was stating the truth about the letter, that Marsh had not mailed it. Harrington shrugged.

"The letter doesn't interest me," he said coldly. "I have a copy in my pocket. It shall be delivered to Whittaker at once."

The blackmailer's face fell for a moment, and then a shrewd, golden grin parted his crooked lips.

"You've been a long time delivering it—eh, Mr. Harrington? You've been carrying it about with you since yesterday afternoon, and you haven't delivered it yet. Come on now; 'fess up. Maybe you meant to hand it over to Whittaker, and maybe you didn't. If you did, it was only because you thought Whittaker would get the original in the morning and that you wouldn't gain anything by tearing it up. Well, Whittaker won't get the original, so there's no reason why you should give him the copy. He'll never be the wiser. It's a secret between you and me."

Harrington's face darkened. The thought of sharing a secret with this loathsome blackmailer was revolting.

"Think it over," said Tarkin with an insinuating grin. "You and Miss Lanyard are already in bad. You're here under phoney names and it looks as if only you could have done it. Maybe they'll say you and Miss Lanyard cooked it up together. And now this letter of Marsh's on top of everything else! Not so good, eh?"

Harrington tried to clear his mind for sober thinking, but Tarkin's sickening nearness made it hard. He wondered just how deeply Theresa Lanyard was involved. Certainly, the circumstances had an ugly aspect. The thought of guilt did not enter his mind, but the innocent sometimes suffered grievously at the hands of the law.

"So we'll just keep out little secret between ourselves," Tarkin suggested, shrewdly cocking a rheumy eye. "Of course, secrets are expensive."

"So it seems." Harrington's lip curled. "Where is the letter?"

"Now, would I be likely to tell, after the way you've been treating me? Tell me what you're willing to pay, and maybe we do business."

"You are a most thoroughgoing blackmailer, Tarkin. Keep the letter and take this."

He swung out his foot, and Tarkin would have received a vigorous kick if he had not jumped just in time. Like a frightened cur, he scuttled across the garage to the door, flung a whining imprecation over his shoulder, and then he straightened up of a sudden and gazed rigidly toward the house.

"Something is up," he muttered. "Look at all those lights."

Harrington restrained an impulse to kick him out of his sight, and stepped up beside him. There were lights all over the house, and additional lights appeared even as he stood staring through the drizzle. All at once, it seemed, the house had become a scene of bustling activity.

"That's queer," said Tarkin. "Wonder what— Oh, of course! They're looking for Miss Lanyard. Not so good, eh? But they won't find her. Not a chance?"

Harrington gave him a level look, then gripped him firmly by the collar.

"Out with it!" he said sharply, giving the man a vigorous shaking. "Where is Miss Lanyard?"

"Say, lay off me, can't you? Didn't I tell you Miss Lanyard went to powder her nose. She must have gone a long way to find a powder puff. Women are queer."

Harrington shook him again, and so soundly this time that the blackmailer's head struck the door-post. A stream of bleating cries poured from his lips.

"Where is she?" Harrington thundered.

"Let go of me, and maybe I'll tell you." The little man squirmed and gasped for breath.

"If you have been up to deviltry—" Harrington began threateningly.

"Ah, forget it! I can't help it if Miss Lanyard suddenly decides to take a walk, can I?"

"A walk?" Harrington's eyes bored into his sallow, twisting face. "Did Miss Lanyard go out for a walk?"

"Well, not a walk, exactly. Call it a run, and

you'll hit it. The last I saw of her she was going like mad!"

"Which way?"

"How should I know? Women don't tell me their secrets."

"You lie, Tarkin! You know. Out with it!"

The blackmailer shrank away from the reach of his hand and peered at him with a shrewd and sullen expression.

"Yes, maybe I know," he admitted. "Maybe I could tell you. It depends. What's the information worth to you?"

Harrington glanced at the lighted windows across the wide lawn. A mutter of supreme disgust broke through his compressed lips, and then he flung himself on the blackmailer and, seizing him by the throat, started choking him unmercifully. Tarkin squirmed and kicked, and a stream of gurgling sounds issued from his mouth.

"Will you tell?" Harrington demanded.

"Yes—stop!" The clutch eased, and the man, shaking in every limb, gulped air into his lungs. "All right, I'll tell. It wouldn't have hurt you to pay me a little something, but since you won't—" he broke off at a menacing gesture from Harrington—"Miss Lanyard handed me a note for you," he added sullenly.

"She handed *you* a note?" Harrington asked suspiciously.

"Well, with the servants asleep, there was nobody else to hand it to, and Miss Lanyard left in a hurry. Here it is."

He drew a folded note from his pocket. For a

moment, as he took it, Harrington studied the man's unwholesome countenance. Then he unfolded the note and read the pencilled scrawl:

> Go with this man. Remember the ash pile.
> THERESA LANYARD.

Twice Harrington read the brief note, and again he looked suspiciously at the blackmailer.

"Are you sure you know what this note says?"

"Sure I do. It's short and to the point. But that stuff about the ash pile—I don't get that."

Thoughtfully, Harrington studied the note again. He knew Theresa's handwriting. This was either genuine or a very clever forgery. The allusion to the ash pile seemed to put the stamp of authenticity years ago now—he had stood with Theresa beside the ash pile, and there they had entered into a partnership, and pledged themselves to bring Mooreland's murderer to justice. Tarkin could know nothing about that, no matter how much else he knew. Theresa, doubtless, had intended the allusion to the ash pile as a sort of countersign.

"All right," said Harrington curtly. "Get in the car."

"I think we walk," Tarkin rejoined. "It isn't far. With the roads wet, the car could be traced, and that wouldn't be so good."

Harrington regarded him sharply. The man was doubtless right, but Tarkin's every word and look inspired him with distrust. He stepped up close to the cringing man.

"Tarkin," he said, "if this is a trick, I'll kill you. Now come on."

With a bleating protestation of good faith, the man started out into the drizzle, and Harrington followed, keeping his hand on the pocket where he kept the pistol. Tarkin moved with a slinking gait, his head bobbing up and down, muttering to himself. He followed no path, and he seemed to set the course over hard and rocky ground that was not likely to show footprints.

For a quarter of an hour, they walked in silence. Their destination appeared to be much farther away than Tarkin had indicated.

"How much farther?" Harrington asked.

"We'll be there in a few minutes," Tarkin giggled maliciously. "Wet and tired, eh? Serves you right for being stingy."

Harrington plodded on behind. The darkness was so thick that at times he had difficulty in keeping his guide in sight. Apparently, the blackmailer knew every rock and tree, for he never hesitated for direction. At length they brought up in front of a gate in a stone fence. A light glimmered among the trees.

"Whose place is this?" Harrington demanded.

"Martin Carmody's." Tarkin was fumbling with the lock on the gate. "He lives out here the year around."

"Carmody," Harrington thought as they passed through the gate. That was the man who had lent his car and chauffeur to take Theresa on her mysterious mission to the hilltop.

They were now walking up a gravelled walk.

Tarkin mounted a series of stone steps, and then his slinking figure was blotted out in the impenetrable shadows massed along the side of the house.

"Just walk straight ahead and ring the bell," he directed.

Harrington moved forward. He had an odd feeling that each step might lead him into a trap. There were no lights on this side of the house. Like a blind man, he picked his way in the blackness until he came up against a wall, and then he fumbled back and forth for a door. At length, he found the button and pressed it.

Then came a long wait. He stirred uneasily. He was drenched, and tired besides, and his nerves were jangling. Time and again he rang. There was no sounds anywhere, only the *drip-drip* of the rain and the sighing of the wind, and the house seemed wrapped in a deathlike stillness. Yet, there must be life within, for he had seen a light as they approached. It was curious, though, that no one answered his repeated rings.

He felt a sudden stab of uneasiness. Suppose that the note had been forged after all, in spite of the intimate allusion to the ash pile. Suppose the whole thing had been a clever trick to lure him away from Theresa at a time when she was in desperate need of capable assistance. Suppose——

"Tarkin!" he cried sharply.

No reply came, and he knew then that the blackmailer had vanished. And, in the same instant, the door came soundlessly open.

CHAPTER XII

IRON BARS

"WHO'S there?" a timid voice asked, and, in the darkness, Harrington saw the blurred glint of a face. It was a strange reception, he thought.

"Harrington—Leonard Harrington," he replied.

A breath of relief sounded, but the man in the opening seemed to look out over Harrington's shoulder to assure himself that there were no prowlers in the background.

"I'm a nervous man," he confessed. "I have a horror of burglars. Please come in."

He led the way, and Harrington, tingling with a variety of emotions, followed. They entered a library, a large, pleasant room. The rugs and the wall decorations had a most soothing quality, and the log fire had a very cheerful effect.

Harrington looked at his host. He was a tall, grey man with pink cheeks. His shoulders had a tendency to stoop, and he had a habit of holding his head a trifle to one side. He had alert, nervous eyes and looked like a man who would jump at the slightest sound. A thick band of grey hair falling down over his left temple gave him a ludicrously rakish aspect.

"I'm Martin Carmody," he announced as he closed the door. "Glad to see you, Harrington. It's a great relief to have you here."

While Harrington watched him curiously, he went to each of the three windows and, raising the shade for an instant, looked out. It became apparent, as he did so, that each window was very well protected by iron bars on the outside.

"Burglars are the bane of my life," he admitted. "You are not afraid of burglars, are you, Harrington?"

"Oh, not particularly." Harrington smiled. He suspected that Carmody had a nervous dread of a number of things.

Carmody, his head aslant, inspected his tall, slender figure with its suggestion of quiet strength, and the inspection seemed to reassure him.

"Where is Miss Lanyard?" Harrington asked.

"In there." The older man indicated one of the two doors leading from the room. "She is resting now. The poor girl is exhausted."

"She sent me a note. Didn't she wish to see me?"

"I know about the note. She told me. Yes, she wants to see you, but first of all she wanted to get you out of harm's way."

"Harm's way?" There was a tingle of suspicion in Harrington's ash-grey eyes.

"Well, out of Whittaker's way." Carmody chuckled uneasily. "It's the same thing. Just turn your mind back over that distressing episode in the car." He shivered nervously, as if the subject were extremely distasteful. "Theresa gave me your version of the affair. According to your own statement, it would have been a physical im-

possibility for anybody but yourself to commit the murder. That's correct, isn't it?"

"Substantially, if we judge by appearances."

"There you are! Whittaker would have placed you under arrest before morning. You couldn't blame him. Well, that's what Theresa wanted to prevent."

Harrington's fumbling fingers fastened absently on the little button in his vest pocket.

"Why?" he asked pointedly.

A pale, humorous flicker showed in Carmody's eyes.

"Maybe she likes you. Maybe she thinks nice men are so few that it's a shame to put one of them in gaol. Anyway, didn't you two pledge a sort of partnership night before last? Your fates are linked, so to speak. If one of you is dragged off to gaol, the other will soon follow. Theresa has been drawn into this ugly mess as deeply as you have."

"Oh, not quite. We may both be under suspicion, but I'm under graver suspicion than Miss Lanyard."

"You say that because you don't know all the facts."

"Perhaps so, but I can't see that we gain anything by running away. That's a confession of guilt."

"What would you gain by going to gaol?"

Harrington meditated. There was a pucker of doubt between his eyes.

"I infer Miss Lanyard has told you everything?"

"Everything. I'm an old friend of the family.

I know, of course, that Lanyard isn't her name any more than yours is Harrington."

"What do you know about Samuel B. Tarkin?"

The older man grew a little confused of a sudden. "He—er—proved an efficient guide, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes, but it surprises me that Miss Lanyard should intrust her messages to a blackmailer. And he vanished most mysteriously after leading me to your door."

"He probably realised that you didn't relish his company."

Harrington considered. The explanation, as far as it went, seemed adequate enough, but there was still an element of doubt in his mind. His eyes went to the door at the side of the library.

"If you don't mind, I'll just look in for a moment."

He walked deliberately to the door, opened it quietly, and glanced into a smaller room. The light from the library reading lamp fell through the doorway and revealed Theresa fast asleep on a sofa, with a rug thrown over her. He closed the door and turned away.

"Satisfied?" Carmody inquired. "Do you know, I rather like a man who doesn't take too much for granted. One can't be too careful. I envy Theresa. It's wonderful to be able to lie down and sleep after such an experience. Youth and health!" He sighed wistfully. "And a clear conscience, of course."

Harrington gazed steadily into his twitching face. A question rolled off his tongue without forethought.

"Do you know who killed Marsh?"

Carmody winced, then chuckled nervously.

"Sensible question, Harrington. When a mysterious crime is committed, we are apt to ask *how* it was done rather than *who* did it. The *how* is, after all, not very important. Yes, I think I know."

Harrington watched him tensely. With head tilted to the side, and with a brooding look in his eyes, the older man was looking down at the carpet.

"This is the way I look at it, Harrington. No murder is ever committed without a motive. Several persons had a sufficient and adequate motive for killing Marsh. There is Harry Stoddard. You met him at that old mountain-top hotel. Then there is myself. Yes, as far as motive goes, I might have done it. Then there is Theresa. She had a motive, too, and the police won't be slow in digging it up. And then there is you, Harrington."

"I?" Harrington exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes, you. You had a motive, too."

Harrington stared at him. His face was solemn despite the brooding smile that hovered about his lips.

"Nonsense! I didn't like Marsh, but I don't kill everybody I dislike. You can't call that a motive."

"No, I don't. I'm talking about real motives."

"Real motives?" Harrington laughed dazedly. The suggestion was startling to the point of absurdity. "If I had a real motive, wouldn't I know it?"

"Not necessarily."

Harrington gasped. Of a sudden, he wondered if Carmody's brain was twisted. But no, the man

looked quite sane, and he seemed to enjoy the mystification he had created.

"You had a motive for killing Marsh," he insisted, "and Whittaker will soon find it. Let's see—that makes four." He counted on his fingers. "Stoddard, Theresa, myself, and you! I suppose it occurs to you that, out of these four, you are the only one who was with Marsh when he died?"

"Oh, yes, that's obvious. But this motive you speak of——"

"Just wait and see. You will soon understand. The police— By the way, there's one I forgot to mention—Roscoe Carstairs. That makes five."

"Roscoe Carstairs?" Harrington echoed. "I've never heard of him."

"But maybe you've seen him. A thickset man with a very white face—the whitest face in the world?"

"Thickset and white-faced? That's a striking combination. No, I'm sure I never saw him."

"Perhaps you will." Carmody looked as if the mere thought of Roscoe Carstairs inspired him with dread. "Well, in spite of the circumstances, and in spite of what the police think, my guess is that Carstairs is the murderer."

Harrington regarded him intently. Apparently, he had spoken from a strong conviction.

"You seem to know a great deal about this murder."

Carmody was silent for a little. His timid eyes moved from the floor to the door behind which Theresa was sleeping.

"I know human nature," he declared, "and I know a great deal about Marsh's private history. The solution of murder mysteries is generally found in a man's private affairs."

Harrington nodded thoughtfully. Carmody's incomprehensible statement, attributing a motive for the murder to himself, was still agitating his mind. At length he shrugged.

"Five suspects!" he mused. "But does that make the list complete? What about Tarkin? And what about Luke Garbo? Their actions have been rather peculiar."

Carmody chuckled morosely.

"If you want to put all peculiar people in gaol, you will have to build a lot more gaols. No, I'm still betting on Roscoe Carstairs."

Harrington gazed at him pointedly, but Carmody did not seem in the mood for explanations. With his quick, nervous gait, and with head aslant, he walked about the room, glancing uneasily to all sides. At length, he paused and took a cigarette from a silver box on the reading table. As he watched him, a vagrant thought came to Harrington's mind.

"Carmody," he said casually, with a smile, "are you sure you didn't commit the murder yourself?"

The older man, in the act of lighting a cigarette, let the match go out. A shiver ran through him.

"I might have done it," he confessed, "but murder takes more nerve than I have." He struck a fresh match and, with hand atremble, lighted his cigarette. His lip twisted into a sickly smile. "But you strike me as a man who has nerve enough for anything, Harrington."

"Oh, it takes more than nerve to commit a murder." Harrington fixed a frowning look on the older man. "I don't like this arrangement, Carmody. It looks as if Miss Lanyard and I had run away."

"Would you rather be in gaol?"

"I don't like it," Harrington repeated. "Whittaker thinks we have flown, and flight implies guilt. You see, by acting this way, we are playing into the hands of the murderer. The murderer can feel safe as long as somebody else acts guilty."

"Something in that," Carmody admitted. "I didn't think—" He paused abruptly and, with a throaty exclamation, jerked his head toward the door of the room in which Theresa was sleeping. "What on earth was that?"

Harrington, too, had heard something. He gazed tensely toward the door while he tried to identify the sound. And then, even as he looked at it, the door came slowly open. A man stepped in, closed it behind him, then stood with his back to it. He was a thickset man with rather blunt features and an unnaturally white face.

Carmody shrank back and stared at the intruder. His face and shoulders sagged as if a sudden paralysis had seized him.

"Carstairs!" he exclaimed in a sickly voice.

CHAPTER XIII

ROSCOE CARSTAIRS

THE man at the door nodded. He was smiling—a smile so faint that it was like a shadow against his white skin. He looked quite harmless, Harrington thought, yet his appearance seemed to have filled Carmody with dread.

"Hello, Carmody," he said, then looked at Harrington. "Who is your visitor?"

Carmody was too dumbfounded to reply, and Harrington said nothing. He gazed with growing curiosity at the man at the door. Carstairs's voice was as peculiar as his complexion. The former was unnaturally soft, the latter unnaturally white.

"How—how did you get in?" Carmody stammered.

"By a window," said Carstairs in his strangely gentle voice, but with a faint note of derision.

"But the iron bars?"

"You can accomplish a lot with patience and a file."

Carmody swallowed and leaned against the table. Harrington's gaze narrowed as he continued to look at the newcomer. Suddenly, it struck him as significant that Carstairs should have entered the house through the room now occupied by Theresa.

"You mean—" Carmody tried to assume a severe

expression—"that you forced your way into my house?"

"Yes. Any objection?"

Carmody found no answer. The man's calm, soft-tongued insolence seemed to leave him speechless. Now, acting on a disquieting suspicion, Harrington stepped up to him.

"Carstairs," he said levelly, "get away from that door."

Carstairs measured him with an indolent look and only planted himself the more firmly in front of the door.

"No," he drawled, "I'm comfortable here. Who are you?"

"I'm Leonard Harrington. Move away!"

"Oh, Harrington. Yes, I know who you are. I believe Whittaker is looking for you. He thinks——"

From the other side of the door came a muffled scream, like that of a person awakened from a sound sleep. Harrington stood rigid for an instant, and then he grabbed Carstairs by the coat collar and administered a sharp jerk. The effort was utterly ineffectual. The man stood as firmly as if he were rooted to the floor.

Another cry, a faint and broken one, came from the interior. Harrington's hand darted toward the pistol in his pocket, but, in an instant, his arm was gripped in a clutch as hard as jaws of steel. Still another cry, remote and muffled, reached his ears. He struggled to free his arm, but a sharp, stabbing pain made him desist.

"Don't get excited," Carstairs advised. "She is

only frightened. I told my man not to hurt her."

Harrington caught a glimpse of Carmody's face. It was palsied with fright, and he knew he could expect no assistance from that quarter.

"I supposed she would scream," Carstairs remarked. "Women always do. That's why I came in here to act as buffer."

Again Harrington tried to jerk his arm away from the clutch of the soft, prehensile fingers. A twinge of excruciating pain drew a groan from his lips. He swung his left hand back to drive a blow into Carstairs's white face, and, in an instant, his entire body was convulsed with agony.

"Sorry," said Carstairs gently, "but you force me to hurt you."

Harrington groaned with despair and physical torment. It seemed that a mere playful twist of Carstairs's fingers was enough to inflict unbearable torture. He listened tensely while the blood pounded in his head. There were no more sounds now. The room behind the door was ominously quiet. What had happened to Theresa?

Carstairs's grip on his arm relaxed. He felt suddenly weak, as if those twinges of racking agony had drained his strength. For a moment, the room blurred and heaved, but he could still see Carstairs's white, smiling face. And then the face seemed to fade out and vanish. There came a sound like the closing of a door.

After a moment of dizziness, he stared about him. There was no one in the room but Carmody and himself, and the older man stood gaping at him, transfixed with horror.

"Where did he go?" Harrington cried.

Carmody pointed a shaking finger at the door on the side of the room. Harrington rushed out. The sofa on which Theresa had lain was empty. A white curtain was fluttering before an open window. With an agonizing sense of helplessness, he turned away, and just then the sharp report of a backfire and then an engine's steady throb sounded out in front.

"Gone!" Carmody groaned. "And they took Theresa! Good grief!"

Harrington stared at him. His brain was not quite clear yet. The after-twinges of the most excruciating pain he had ever known seemed to be shooting through his body.

"Where do you suppose they are taking her?"

"Heaven only knows. But I'm afraid—" He shuddered and choked. "I'm afraid they'll kill her!"

"Kill her?" Harrington echoed, and then a sudden shock swept the last remnant of stupor from his brain. Carstairs's face haunted him, unnaturally white and smilingly malignant. He rushed to the door.

"Wait!" Carmody cried, wringing his hands in mental anguish. "Where——"

"I'm going to catch that car if I have to chase it all over creation."

"Don't be a fool. You can't catch it afoot."

Harrington turned. The words thrust a wedge of sanity into his brain.

"We'll both go," Carmody declared. "My car can do eighty miles an hour. Oh, where are those keys?"

He fumbled frantically in his pockets, and, at length he pulled out a key container. Hurriedly, and yet gently, Harrington took it from him.

"You stay here, Carmody. There's nothing you can do. I'll do it alone."

He pushed the fear-stricken man into a chair, but Carmody sprang up again.

"I—I must go!" he stammered. "Can't you see? She is my—my daughter."

"Your—" Harrington stared at him in utter astonishment. His brain made a few swift revolutions, and then he shoved the older man back into the chair. He saw it was necessary to be brutal now. "No, you stay here, Carmody. You would be worse than useless. You want me to bring her back alive, don't you? Well, then don't interfere."

He sprang quickly from the room and out into the open. The drizzle had ceased; the sky had turned from black to grey. Across the lawn, behind a fringe of trees, he saw a squatty building which he thought must be the garage. He rushed over and tried the keys in the lock.

An undersized figure slunk out of the dusk and approached.

"In a hurry, eh? Know where you're going?"

The first key failed to work. Harrington tried another. He cast a look of loathing on the ubiquitous blackmailer.

"Get away, you rat!"

Tarkin giggled. The second key turned in the lock, and Harrington slid the immense door open.

"There are three roads leading away from here,"

the blackmailer explained. "Suppose you took the wrong one? Not so good, eh?"

Harrington wanted to administer a sound kick, but a sudden thought restrained him. He grabbed the man by the collar.

"Did you see which way that car went?"

"Well, I've got eyes, and sometimes it pays me to use them."

Harrington dragged him inside the car, lifted him squealing from the floor, and flung him into the front seat, to the right of the driver's place. Then he jumped inside and started the engine. It was only about a hundred feet to where the private driveway emerged into the crossroads. He scanned the landscape in all directions, but there was no sign of another car.

"Which way, Tarkin?" he asked sharply.

"Well, I'm not so sure now. It was a kind of dark and——"

"You could see the headlights."

"Well, maybe. How much——"

"Not a cent." Applying the emergency brake, Harrington turned to him threateningly. "Will you tell, or will you take the beating of your life? Decide quickly."

Tarkin saw something in the dark, determined face that frightened him.

"Straight ahead," he said sullenly.

For a moment, Harrington searched his unwholesome face, and then the car plunged forward with a suddenness that flung Tarkin back against the cushion. Harder and harder, Harrington bore down on the accelerator. There was a roar of wind in his

ears. The landscape, hazy and unreal in the grey dawn, flew past the windows in blurred zig-zagging lines.

"Better go easy," Tarkin advised. "We turn soon."

Harrington flung him a sharp, suspicious glance. How could Tarkin know? Through the wind-shield he looked out into the grey morning dusk. His eyes narrowed. The landscape looked vaguely familiar.

He was rushing down a hill now, and he released the accelerator and gently applied the foot brake.

He remembered the locality now. At the bottom of the hill, he knew, was a narrow and rutty road swerving off to the left and climbing up the hill to the old abandoned hotel.

"That's right," said Tarkin as he swung sharply into the hilltop road. "You seem to know. Why did you want me along?"

Harrington sent the car rushing up the hill. Familiar sensations thronged his mind. It seemed as if he would only have to look into the mirror to see Marsh sitting back there in the dusk, a wicked and crafty smile wreathing his broad face.

The hill grew steeper, the engine began to labour, and he shifted into second. Tarkin sat sullenly beside him, only grunting now and then. Soon, in the grey light of advancing day, he caught a glimpse of the old hotel. At the first opportunity he swung off the road and drove the car into a small clearing sheltered by surrounding trees. He shut off the engine and cast a doubtful look on the blackmailer. What should he do with Tarkin?

"Better hurry," said the blackmailer surlily, easing himself deeper into the cushions. "If you don't, there'll be a murder. Not so good, eh?"

A trace of perplexity crept into Harrington's searching gaze. There was something curious about Tarkin. With a shrug, he removed the ignition key and put it in his pocket, then hurried away. It was necessary to move cautiously now, for someone might see him from the windows of the old hotel, and that would jeopardize his mission.

Visions of the white face and soft voice of Roscoe Carstairs pursued him as he darted in and out among the trees and bushes alongside the road. The fear-stricken countenance of Carmody haunted him, too. Theresa's father! He wondered to what extent the relationship explained her entanglement in the affair. And then, as he came out in the open, he slapped his hip pocket to make certain that the pistol was there. He might need it soon.

Now the grounds of the old hotel stretched before him. There was only a thin sprinkling of trees, and, while running from one to another, he was exposed to the gaze of any chance observer. But he gained the long, sagging piazza without interference, and now he stole quickly to the main door. He turned the knob, held the door open a crack, and listened. In a moment, he stepped inside. He was in the lobby of the old hotel, almost denuded of furniture. The lazy morning wind was whispering through cracks in the window panes. Though it was fairly light outside, it was still dusk within. His eyes fixed on the stairway and the door under it. It was behind that door he had lain hidden while he witnessed the

stormy scene between Theresa and the dark and dapper Harry Stoddard.

Where was Theresa now? Her father had seemed to fear that she had been dragged off to some horrible fate. Doubtless, Carmody had ample reason for his apprehensions. With a recurring vision of a white and evilly smiling face, Harrington looked up the stairway. It was quiet up there. As far as eyes and ears could tell, he was alone in the house.

He started up, silently cursing the steps that creaked under his weight. At the upper landing, a long, dim corridor stretched out before him, with doors on each side. All his senses on the alert, he walked to the end of it, then turned back and ascended another flight. The third floor was as silent and lifeless as the one below. He dipped into a few of the rooms, all stripped of furniture and most of them having broken windows and crumbling plaster. There was no sign that anyone had been there since the old hotel was in its heyday.

There remained only the attic now. He had received several inklings of curious things going on up there. He ascended the last flight of stairs, and, at first, it seemed as if the place had been abondoned to spiders and mice, to dust and decay. Then, as he advanced a few steps, he experienced a feeling that had been absent when he roamed the lower parts— a sense of human occupancy. The air was less stale, the chill and the dampness less penetrating. Something told him that, not so long ago, human feet had moved over these dusty spaces.

The feeling made his nerves tingle. Someone with evil intentions might be lurking in the heavy shadows

that lay on all sides, scarcely disturbed by the meagre light falling through two grimy windows in the ceiling. It was possible, too, that somewhere up here he would find Theresa Lanyard.

The thought quickened his pulses and brought sharply conflicting emotions. He recalled Carmody's ashen, fear-stricken face and the grim apprehensions he had voiced. What if he were too late? He put the nerve-shaking thought from him and hurried on. Now, as his eyes grew accustomed to the dusk, he saw a partition at the farther end of the attic. It ran the whole width of the house and was bisected by a corridor. Possibly this part had once been the servants' quarters.

He walked toward it, cautiously drawing his pistol as he did so. With a sharp sensation of danger, he stepped softly into the corridor. There were two doors on each side, and he stopped before the nearest. Very gently, he turned the knob in his hand and pushed the door open. The hinges gave a slight, warning squeak, and then a voice spoke—a softly purring voice that instinctively made him grip the pistol a little harder:

"Ah, you, Harrington. Come right in."

CHAPTER XIV

PHARAOH'S COFFIN

IT was Roscoe Carstairs's voice! To Harrington's ears it was both menacing and exhilarating. His quick appraisal of the man in Carmody's house had told him that an evil and exceedingly cunning brain was at work behind that astonishingly white face. It would be a duel of wits now.

Unlike the other rooms he had seen, this one was furnished. A light fell from a small window in the sloping roof, and directly beneath it Carstairs was sitting at perfect ease in an arm-chair. Just now, with the misty morning light falling upon it, his face seemed grey rather than white.

Harrington entered, closed the door behind him, and advanced, pistol in hand. Carstairs looked him over coolly. He saw the pistol, and his lips took on the curious smile Harrington had already seen—the smile that lay like a shadow against his skin.

"Sit down, Harrington." With a slight motion of his white hand, he indicated a chair. "By the way, do you always carry firearms when you make calls?"

"It depends," said Harrington curtly. He walked up close to the man in the chair and held the pistol levelled at Carstairs's broad chest. "Carstairs, what did you do with Miss Lanyard?"

"Oh, she is somewhere around the house. Do you wish to see her?"

"I do," said Harrington, rather taken aback by the casual reply.

"Well, I expect her in here any moment. If you are not in too great a hurry, sit down and wait. She won't be long."

Harrington stared at him, bewildered by his calm manner. It seemed impossible this could be the same man who, a short time ago, had abducted Theresa in such roughshod fashion.

"I don't believe you," he declared.

"No matter. Miss Lanyard herself will bring the proof of what I say. When you see her, then you will believe me. In the meantime, you might as well be comfortable."

Harrington's bewilderment grew. It was either superb acting, or else entire candour. Which of the two?

"You are not denying you kidnapped her?"

"Why, no. You saw me, so why should I deny it? Anyway, the word is subject to definition. It would be more correct to say that I rescued her."

"Oh," he said sarcastically, "you call it a rescue. A rescue from what?"

"Death."

The startling little word fell casually from Carstairs's lips. Harrington searched his face. It seemed to grow whiter with the brightening of the light falling from the overhead window.

"Look here, Harrington"—Carstairs spoke in a slightly altered tone—"if you came here with the idea of taking Miss Lanyard back to Carmody's

house, you might as well go back now. I don't know how you stand in this matter, but I'm rather sorry I had to twist your arm so unmercifully. Anyway, as long as I can help it, Miss Lanyard is not going to be exposed to further danger."

"Danger?" said Harrington lamely. His brain was a whirl of contradictions, and the most astonishing contradiction was Carstairs himself. "The way you acted, I thought you were dragging her off to her death. Her father thought so, too."

"Her—what?" The soft tone bespoke acute puzzlement.

"Her father—Mr. Carmody."

Carstairs turned his white face upward and gave him a long stare. The muscles of his mouth twitched.

"Did Martin Carmody tell you that he is Miss Lanyard's father?"

"Isn't he?"

Carstairs looked as if he wanted to laugh outright.

"Ask her when she comes in," he suggested. "In the meantime, I don't hesitate to tell you that I took Miss Lanyard away because I had good reason to believe that Carmody would have murdered her."

Harrington gaped at him. His brain felt as if it had been turned inside out. Mechanically, he lowered the pistol and sat down.

"But she went voluntarily to Carmody's house," he pointed out.

"Voluntarily? Well, perhaps. That's another word that requires definition. It would be more correct to say that she was enticed there."

There was no direct connection, but for an instant Harrington's thoughts went back to Samuel Tarkin.

"But don't take my word for it," Carstairs hastened to say. "Let Miss Lanyard tell you all about it. Ask her what she thinks of Martin Carmody as a father." Again his lips twitched humorously. "Father, indeed!" he said under his breath.

Harrington regarded him narrowly. His imagination conjured up a vision of the fear-stricken old man he had left a while ago. Had Carmody worked a hoax on him? Or was Carstairs working a hoax on him now? Well, he would reserve judgment for a while.

He looked about him. The room was poorly furnished, and the roof overhead had an ominous sag. Carstairs, with his white face and his shadowy smile, seemed to dominate the scene.

"Live here?" Harrington inquired.

"Oh, no, I just come here occasionally for a change of scenery."

"It seems several other persons have acquired the same habit."

Carstairs nodded thoughtfully. "Did you know," he asked, "that old David Mooreland was the owner of this hotel?"

Harrington started. The question was accompanied by a sharp but furtive glance. In the stress of recent events, he had almost forgotten David Mooreland and his tragic death. Yet it was his determination to find Mooreland's murderer that had drawn him into all these complications.

"Did you?" Carstairs prompted.

"No," said Harrington. For a moment, in imagination, he had been poking into the ash heap in Marsh's cellar.

"But you know Mooreland?" The other gave him a quick, searching glance as he asked the question.

"Only slightly," Harrington prevaricated.

"Curious old fellow," said Carstairs musingly. "He spent a great deal of time here shortly before his—er—disappearance. The hotel had then been closed for some years, and he stayed here all alone, except for a trusted servant. I suppose you know that?"

"No. It's news to me."

Evidenly, Carstairs was in a communicative mood.

"Some people think he came here to hide," he went on. "It seems he spent his last years in fear of death. Somehow, he had got the idea that one or more persons were after his life. It might have been nothing but a feeble old man's delusion."

"Yet it appears his fears were well founded.. Somebody murdered him."

"Oh, you think so? Well, you may be right. Have you any idea who killed him?"

Harrington hesitated. He wished he had not spoken so frankly.

"I see you have," the other added. "Well, so has Whittaker. And, to be candid with you, so have I."

Harrington looked up quickly. The smile on Carstairs's white face seemed even more shadowy than usual.

"Who?" he asked.

"Well, if you ask Whittaker, and if he is frank with you, he will tell you that Martin Carmody is the man."

"Carmody!" said Harrington thoughtfully. This was an entirely new slant on the Mooreland affair.

"Yes, but no arrest has been made, because Whittaker lacks the necessary evidence. And just now, of course, he is immersed in quite another mystery—the Marsh murder. Queer case that, Harrington. Why on earth did you give such an incredible account of it?"

"It was the truth."

"Was it?" asked Carstairs slowly. "Well, perhaps, but people don't want the truth when it is hard to accept. Now, nobody is going to believe that, under the circumstances as you stated them, Marsh got into the car without your knowing it. It will be supposed that you picked him up somewhere with the deliberate intention of murdering him. Then you got flustered and confused and told an impossible cock-and-bull story. That's what they will think."

"Yes, I suppose so." Harrington glanced back over his shoulder. "Miss Lanyard——"

"Oh, she will be here directly. Don't get impatient yet. By the way, are you very anxious to see her?"

"Very," said Harrington firmly, a little of his original distrust reawakening.

"Was that your only purpose in coming here this morning?"

"Of course. What else would I be doing here?"

"Well, I was wondering—" Carstairs leaned back in his chair and regarded him with his shadowy smile. His eyes were keen and shrewd. "Are you sure you didn't come to look for a coffin?"

"A—what?" Harrington stared at him, but there was no sign of jocosity in his broad, white face. "What sort of coffin?"

"Pharaoh's coffin. A rather small coffin, I should say. Possibly it was intended for a baby Pharaoh."

Harrington glanced impatiently at the door. He felt certain now that Carstairs, despite his serious expression, was indulging in a grotesque joke.

"No," he declared, "I'm not interested in coffins as yet."

"I can see you are not." A moment longer Carstairs continued his scrutiny. "And I hope it may be a long time—— Come in."

A knock had just sounded on the door. Harrington was about to turn his head to see who was entering, but he caught a most curious expression on Carstairs's face just then. Mechanically he tightened his hold on the pistol he had been holding all the time.

"Oh, Stoddard," said Carstairs, addressing the newcomer, "seen Miss Lanyard lately?"

Harrington turned, and, in the same instant, a dark object described an arc above his head and descended with savage force. The room heaved. The light filtering through the little window in the roof was blotted out. Everything was dark now, but there was laughter in the darkness. Carstairs was laughing.

CHAPTER XV

THE TWO VOICES

WITH difficulty Harrington turned over on his back. There were sounds in the air—sharp, piercing sounds that transported him from a state of semi-stupor to a complete awakening. Though they seemed to come from a near-by source, they meant absolutely nothing for the moment. There was a dull pain in his head that made it impossible for him to apprehend the meaning of things.

Sunlight was pouring in through the window in the roof, striking the room at an angle which, had he been able to reason it out, would have told him that the day was far advanced. Stray impressions, dim and very remote, trudged through his brain. Now it was a laugh—a soft, gloating sort of laugh. Now it was something about a coffin—Pharaoh's coffin. And now he heard those piercing sounds again.

"Somebody screaming," he thought, but the thought made no impression. It was only two meaningless words that his brain refused to take hold of. But the laugh seemed a tangible thing, though several hours had passed since he heard it. And the allusion to Pharaoh's coffin was coupled in his mind with a picture of a very white face impressed with a shadowy smile.

And then he remembered. Yes, Carstairs had

tricked him very cleverly. Good actor, that Carstairs. He had almost convinced him that black was white and that white was black. Very subtly, without apparent effort, he had conveyed the idea that Carmody was the black sheep and he, Carstairs, the white one. It was the effortlessness that put the impression across. He had only been playing for time, of course, temporizing until Stoddard could come to his aid. And Stoddard had come to his aid with a bludgeon.

Harrington's head was still painful. There was a swelling on the left side. Now it throbbed sharply, now it was only a dull ache, but all the time it made his thoughts spin around in circles. They swung from a gloating laugh to Pharaoh's coffin, and then to a succession of loud cries.

And now, of a sudden, those loud cries drove all the other things into the background. He lay very still. A film oozed away from his brain. The cries, composed of one high trembling note after another, seemed to form pictures in his mind, and the outstanding picture was one of Theresa Lanyard with her small, lovely face, her grey eyes, and her lovely chestnut hair. All at once his disordered thoughts crystalized in a single sharp impression.

It was Theresa who was uttering those cries!

The thought was like a lash on his nerves. He tried to jump up, but something held him back. He could not move his arms or legs. His arms were tied behind his back, and his legs were incapacitated by cords applied just above his ankles.

He groaned, and his head sank back to the cot on which he was lying. And now the screams

rang out louder and louder, shriller and more piercing. His imagination pictured a scene of horror. The fiends were torturing her!

A cold perspiration broke out on his face. He strained furiously at the cords. His lungs were bursting, not from the physical exertion, but with an agony evoked by mental pictures.

And then, as he lay on his back, feeling as if the cries were being wrung from his own bruised body, an incongruous feeling crept upon him. He listened intently. He gauged the pitch and swell of the cries. Somehow, they sounded less terrifying now. They were not really cries of suffering, he thought. Rather they sounded as if they had been produced for vocal effect. But why should one cry like that if one did not suffer?

Even as he debated the question, the cries ceased. There was only silence now—silence and an acute bewilderment. He wondered if his mind was still wandering and if that was why he had got such an odd impression of the cries. And then, as he heard the door open, he quickly closed his eyes and feigned unconsciousness.

Footsteps approached, and, in a moment, someone was standing beside him. As he stimulated the uneasy stupor of a person with a throbbing head, he felt a pair of eyes searching his face. He could see nothing, but his imagination pictured the white countenance and the shadowy smile of Roscoe Carstairs. He fancied the man was quietly laughing at him. It was an uncomfortable moment, and he was glad when a sound at the door drew Carstairs away.

"Well, Stoddard?" he said.

He stiffened for an instant, and the cords gnawed at his wrists. It was Harry Stoddard, the dark, dapper man with the resonant and yet vaguely unpleasant voice, to whom he owed the swelling on his head.

"No luck," Stoddard reported. "Either she doesn't know, or else she won't talk."

"Oh, she knows," said Carstairs in his characteristic mellow voice. "Surprised at you, Stoddard. Thought you had a way with the ladies. Can't you captivate them any longer?"

"Not when it comes to coffins."

Harrington started where he lay on the cot. Pharaoh's coffin again!

"So Miss Lanyard wouldn't talk," Carstairs was saying. "You tried various means of persuasion?"

"Oh, yes, I tried them all."

"With your profound knowledge of feminine wiles, you realize, of course, that when gentleness fails one must try more drastic measures?"

"Yes, and I tried them."

"H'm." Carstairs moved about the room, and presently he stopped again before the cot. Harrington gave an imitation of an unconscious man's groan. "You performed a conscientious job on this poor devil."

"Oh, that was simple. But the other thing—Well, it goes against the grain, you know."

"Ah, chivalry!" Carstair's voice was still mellow, but now it contained a faint sneer. "I hope you weren't too chivalrous?"

"I wasn't. I didn't like it, but I hurt her. She made quite a fuss. You must have heard her screams."

"Yes, I heard them," said Carstairs in a queer tone. "I was trying to read, and they disturbed me. From the volume of them, I gathered she was in mortal pain. But volume is one thing and quality is another."

"What do you mean?" asked Stoddard uneasily.

Carstairs chuckled. Harrington opened his eyes a trifle. He was conscious of a dynamic strain in the air.

"I mean they sounded—what shall I say?—a bit theatrical. Yes, that's the word—theatrical. I don't believe Miss Lanyard was as badly hurt as she tried to make out."

He spoke in a whimsical tone, but Harrington sensed something unpleasant underneath. Evidently Stoddard felt it, too, for a look of alarm was creeping into his dark face. For a few moments no word was spoken.

"It's bad, Stoddard," said Carstairs at length. "There's a weak strain in you. A pretty face raises the devil with you." He laughed musingly. "And so you conspired with the lady to fool me. You told her to let out a few loud yells so I would think you were putting the screws on her. Too bad she isn't a better actress. Are you in love, Stoddard?"

"Love!" Stoddard laughed scoffingly, but with a tremor.

"No? Well, that's a relief." Carstairs voice was gently sarcastic. "What will you bet that I can't make her talk?"

Stoddard said nothing, but Harrington, holding his eyes open a narrow slit, saw a look of aversion on his face.

"You see, Stoddard," the other went on, "I'm not hampered by chivalry, and I know several cute tricks that are guaranteed to loosen the tongues of lovely ladies. Care to make a bet?"

"Ah, Carstairs, what's the use of being crude? Why don't you try subtlety instead of violence?"

Carstairs did not answer for a long time. Harrington trembled and strained at the cords around his ankles and wrists.

"Stoddard," said Carstairs softly, "you're a liar and a coward. I'm going to see Miss Lanyard now. But first I'm——"

His hand swung out and crashed into Stoddard's jaw. The man spun around and, with a gurgling sound in the throat, went to the floor. For a moment, Carstairs stood looking down at the inert figure, then walked softly out.

Harrington tore furiously at the ropes, but to no avail. Evidently they had been tied by an expert. He worked in a blind, savage frenzy, his mind tortured by horrible visions, until he realized that he was only wasting his strength. Any moment now a scream might pierce the awful stillness, and it would be a different scream from those he had heard a little while ago.

Exhausted and perspiring, he glanced up at the window in the roof. It was already growing dusk. Gloom was descending over the desolate hilltop, and there was no hope in any direction. His glance

travelled to where Stoddard lay. Whatever the man might be, he had at least shown human feelings. But there was no hope there, either. Stoddard might lie there for half an hour, and in the meantime——

A cold shudder convulsed him. He strained his ears for sounds which he dreaded to hear. It seemed a little eternity had passed since Carstairs departed on his diabolical mission, yet it could have been only a minute or two. Within the next sixty seconds the hideous performance might begin.

In a delirium of horror he tore at the cords, but he was only bruising his flesh. His blood ran cold, but his skin was bathed in clammy perspiration. The biting of the cords into his flesh became a physical torment, but the visions that streamed through his mind were more agonizing still.

Of a sudden, he lay motionless. He had heard the sound of a door opening. A dwarfish figure slunk out of the dusk and approached him.

"Huh! All trussed up. Fretting yourself into a stew. Not so good, eh?"

For once Harrington felt no loathing in the blackmailer's presence, nor did he inquire how Tarkin, whom he had left seated in the car, had appeared so opportunely. The little man looked about him in the gathering dusk and saw the motionless figure on the floor.

"Stoddard, eh? Somebody must have handed him a good one. Never saw so many crazy goings-on. Carstairs is tearing around like a lunatic, and now he's giving Miss Lanyard the works, and it looks as if——"

"Shut up!" Harrington cried. "And cut these blasted cords."

Tarkin's shrewd eyes measured the cords that bound Harrington's hands and feet and were wound in several layers around his chest. He took out his pocket knife.

"About twenty feet of cord," he estimated, opening the knife. "It'll cost you one hundred dollars a foot. That makes it an even two grand."

"All right—but hurry!"

Tarkin contemplated him with a hurt expression.

"You didn't play fair the other times," he complained. "You kicked me and choked me and mopped the earth with me. I've got you now. Do I get the two grand?"

Harrington listened for a moment, wondering why the air was not rent by cries. Tarkin's commercial instincts aroused no disgust now. He only fumed over the delay.

"Don't be a fool! I don't carry two thousand in my pocket. Now hurry, or I'll——"

He groaned with a realization of helplessness, and the blackmailer giggled.

"Wonder what Carstairs is up to," he mumbled as if to himself. "He's been awfully quiet since he went into the other room. That's a bad sign. When Carstairs is as quiet as that, there'll be trouble popping soon. Glad I'm not in Miss Lanyard's shoes. She is——"

"Dash you!" Harrington cried, heaving frenziedly against the cords. "Don't you know he's gone in there to torture her?"

"I had an idea maybe that's what he was up to?"

"Well, then, aren't you going to cut these cords?"

"Do I get the two grand?"

"You do."

"Is that a promise?"

"It is."

"You give me your word of honour?"

"I do, confound you!"

Tarkin lowered his head and considered.

"It's a bad way to do business, but I'll take a chance on you. Now don't forget."

He slashed the cords, which Harrington was straining in his anxiety to get free.

"Remember," was his parting shot, "you owe me two grand."

Harrington stretched himself, trying to ease his cramped muscles. He felt his hip pocket. The pistol was gone, of course. He felt a little giddy from his injury, and he staggered drunkenly from the room. As he had previously noticed, this end of the attic was partitioned off from the rest and bisected by a corridor with two doors on each side.

There was not a sound anywhere, and in this dark space he could scarcely see anything. He felt weak from his long confinement on the cot, and a sense of impending horrors threatened to swamp his reason. Unarmed as he was, he would have to proceed very cautiously if he were to accomplish anything. He looked up and down the dim corridor, and his eyes fell on a faint streak of light, evidently coming from an ill-fitting door.

He tiptoed over. There was an absolute silence within. He found the knob and gently pushed the door open. And then, blinking his eyes against the sudden illumination, he stood still and stared at one of the strangest spectacles he had ever seen.

CHAPTER XVI

TORTURE

THERESA'S face riveted his attention at once. It was a face frozen into the most appalling look of horror he had ever seen. Every line was taut, the lips rigid, the eyes round and glassy.

It was a room similar to the one he had just left, meagrely furnished and with a window in the ceiling. An oil lamp burned on a rattletrap table, and cheap lithographs were pasted on the crumbling walls.

Harrington had eyes for nothing but Theresa. Her straining face, like an exquisitively carved death mask, told him that she was suffering tortures. Yet no hand was touching her; there was no physical sign of the agony that was staring out of her face. She was sitting in a chair placed against the farther wall, and her eyes were fixed with horrible intensity on a point diagonally opposite.

He passed a moment or two in utter perplexity. Theresa had not even seen him. It was as if all her senses were hypnotized by something she saw across the room. He turned and saw Carstairs leaning negligently against the wall, a dusky smile of amusement tinging his white face. The man evinced no surprise at seeing him. Carstairs appeared to discount all eventualities in advance.

"Oh, you, Harrington," he said casually. "How is the head?"

Harrington marvelled at him. If he was puzzled by his prisoner's sudden release, he showed not the slightest sign of it. If anything, he appeared to welcome the intrusion.

"It's just as well you are here," he added. "This may interest you."

Harrington looked bewilderedly about him, and then his eyes fastened once more on Theresa's fear-frozen face. Yes, she was being tortured, but by whom or what? Again he traced her rigid gaze across the floor, and a new sort of bewilderment came over him. Her eyes, he now discovered, were not fixed on Carstairs, but on an object in the very corner of the room. It was a small sheet-iron stove, aglow with heat. The little door stood ajar, and now and then a small tongue of flame curled out.

He looked from the stove to Theresa and then back to the stove again. There was no question about it. It was the stove, and nothing else, that she was regarding with such an unearthly horror. Unaware of Carstair's amused look, he stepped a little closer to it, and now he saw a small object protruding from the little door near the bottom. It looked like a handle of some sort. He raised his questioning eyes to Carstair's white face.

"Patience, Harrington," said the latter. "You will see directly. It will be worth seeing."

He stooped and pulled out the handle. Attached to it was a thin metal rod tapering to a fine point. The whole looked like an ice pick.

"Not quite hot enough," Carstairs remarked, putting the instrument back. Harrington noticed that he was wearing a glove on his right hand to protect it against the heat.

Harrington's brain whirled. For the moment, all his thoughts were revolving around the instrument in the fire. Of a sudden, he recalled a remark made by the medical examiner who had inspected Marsh's body. The fatal wound, he had declared, looked as if it had been inflicted with an ice pick or a similar implement.

He stood rigid, staring at the handle protruding through the little door. Probably it meant nothing, however. There were millions of ice picks in the world. The only significant circumstance was that this particular ice pick should have appeared in a house situated only a stone's throw from the tragedy.

"Where did you get that ice pick?" he inquired.

"Recognize it?" Carstairs asked, his eyes narrowing.

"Where did it come from?" Harrington insisted.

The other regarded him fixedly, and then a shadowy smile broke out on his white face.

"Ask Samuel Tarkin," he suggested. "You know Tarkin, don't you? Well, ask him. I'm not sure you will get a truthful answer out of him, but you might try."

He drew the instrument out of the fire, glanced at it, and put it back again.

"Almost ready," he remarked. He cast a slanting glance at Harrington. "Curious you should ask that question. Did Tarkin tell you anything?"

"Not a word," Harrington declared, wondering whether the blackmailer was by any chance within hearing distance.

"No, Tarkin wouldn't. It's odd, though."

He looked down at the red-hot stove, a puzzled frown between his eyes. It looked to Harrington as if the ice pick meant a different thing to each of them. In his own mind it was associated with the Marsh murder. In Carstairs's mind—— But it was impossible to determine what was going on behind that white face.

Finally, the other shrugged as if to dismiss a problem from his mind. He turned to Theresa.

"Once more," he said in his mellow voice. "Will you tell?"

She did not seem to hear him. Something flickered in her eyes as she kept staring at the stove. He repeated the question.

"I—I can't," she said in a small, cold voice. "I don't know."

Carstairs sighed. With his foot, he thrust the instrument a little farther into the fire.

"What are you going to do?" Harrington demanded.

"Refresh Miss Lanyard's memory. Incidentally, I'm going to try my skill as a beauty specialist. Glad you happened in, Harrington. I want your opinion. Don't you think a dimple in her left cheek would improve her beauty?"

He glanced meaningfully at the handle. A premonition, at once vague and horrible, made Harrington's blood run cold.

"It isn't a painless process, you know," the

other continued, "but then Miss Lanyard won't be the first woman to suffer in the cause of beauty."

A choking cry of utter dread broke from Theresa's lips.

"I only hope," Carstairs went on, "that I can perform the job without bungling. I should hate to disfigure such a lovely face."

A sickening horror convulsed Harrington. In a flash, he saw the full extent of the diabolical idea. He understood now why Theresa was sitting there in a stupor of dread, watching the instrument in the fire with a look of hypnotic horror. It was a thing more revolting than slow death. A searing touch with a white-hot iron, and her loveliness would be hideously scarred for life.

"You skunk!" Harrington gritted, and then he leaped, seething with an impulse to crash his fist into that white, faintly smiling face. His hand, fired with a savage frenzy, shot out—and was neatly caught around the wrist. A laugh, a playful twist, and his face went grey with pain. And then, without apparent effort, Carstairs flung him farther into the room.

"Don't be a nuisance, Harrington." He spoke as if demonstrating with a wilful child. "You see it's no use."

Harrington leaned weakly against the wall. His body was a mass of shooting pains. He stared groggily at Carstairs's hand. It was a soft, white hand. He had a feeling that it was diabolically inspired. He had experienced its subtle and devastating cunning in Carmody's house, and now the experience had been repeated.

He cast a sultry glance about the room. Faint wisps of smoke curling about the glowing sides of the stove. Overhead, through the little window in the roof, a single star shone in the velvet sky. By the stove, arms crossed, stood Carstairs, gazing patiently at the protruding handle. And at the wall sat Theresa, looking as if enthralled by a vision of horrors.

Why didn't she run? The door was unlocked. But, of course, Carstairs, standing within a single leap of the door, would stop her. Perhaps she had already tried and, in doing so, experienced the fiendish magic of the man's fingers.

Harrington stiffened abruptly. Very leisurely Carstairs was putting on his glove. Now, with the same casual movement, he drew the iron rod from the fire. He held it appraisingly to the light. The point was white, and infinitesimal sparks sizzled around it. Very slowly, he came forward.

A dull, ragged cry broke from Theresa's lips. Quickly Harrington stepped up beside her. The white-hot point of iron came closer and closer, horrible, crawling menace beyond which the face of Carstairs loomed white, composed and smiling.

Terror, abomination and stupefaction clashed in Harrington's brain. Carstairs was proceeding as if he had no fear of an interruption. Did he think that any man would remain idle while such a hideous thing went on? Did he trust the diabolical deftness of his fingers to that extent?

Theresa sprang up and pressed shudderingly against the wall. Nerves crawling, Harrington watched for a sign of the slightest distraction on

Carstairs's part. He was in the position of a soldier who had but one shot and could not afford to waste it.

"Once more," said Carstairs, stopping before the girl. "Will you tell?"

She shrank away from the horrible thing in his hand.

"I can't!" The words were flung out on a fear-choked scream. "I don't know. I swear I don't."

"Sorry," said Carstairs with a shrug. "In that case——"

He raised the sizzling implement. The girl edged back along the wall until she found herself caught in the corner.

"Splendid!" Carstairs murmured. "Exactly where I wanted you."

The thing rose in his hand again, its white point already turning from white to red. Harrington stood motionless, waiting his one chance.

"Wait!" he cried hoarsely. "What do you want to know?"

"It's a little matter concerning a coffin," said Carstairs calmly. "Better keep out of this, Harrington."

The coffin again! Harrington's brain lurched wildly. And then, as Theresa wedged herself frantically into the corner, with the menacing point of fire close to her face, something within him burst loose. He struck out savagely, but the thrust stopped in mid-air. Fingers played lightly around his wrist—lightly but with terrible effect. And this time the fingers did not let go after the one body-

racking twist. They held him at arm's length, administering another twist whenever he tried to move. And all the time the hideous thing in Carstairs's hand crept closer and closer to Theresa's face.

A series of split screams dinned in his ears. Horribly fascinated, he watched the point of iron. It seemed to swell to monstrous proportions, to sweep everything else out of sight. There was an insanity in his brain, but his tortured mind revolved around a single thought. His left hand was still free. It was only his right hand that was caught in Carstairs's monstrous grip. But it was a despairingly slight advantage. Just another playful twist, and his body would be a writhing bundle of agonies.

Suddenly, his brain stood still. There seemed to be a sickening reek in the air—something burning! The thought steadied him strangely, sent a quickening impulse to his senses. He stared at the red point which a few seconds ago had been white. Yes, it could have been only seconds, though it seemed hours. He sniffed. That awful reek was no longer there. It had been only his imagination. But any moment now the thing he had imagined might become ghastly reality.

He stared at the red point. His brain whirled dizzyingly. A mad impulse came, and it seemed that impulse and deed were encompassed in a split second. A moment's insanity, a convulsive heave—and now the frizzing end of the iron was in his left hand and a burning agony was tearing through his flesh.

It was nameless torture, but he laughed crazily as he flung the scorching iron from him. The reek of burned flesh had become reality now, but the reek was coming from his own seared hand, not from the grey, drawn face he saw against the wall. A sudden sensation of relief made him weak, and then his relief turned to loathing and hate.

Carstairs stood motionless, with a stunned look on his white face. It was as if he had witnessed something unbelievable and stupefying. His face was the face of a man utterly dumbfounded, but Harrington saw only the face of a fiend. The reaction came in a blind, surging rage that dulled his senses to the scorching agony in his hand.

His smouldering eyes went to the iron rod lying on the floor. The red glow was slowly fading, but it was still sufficiently hot to form a black, smoking blister on the board. He snatched it up and, with a hoarse cry of rage and abomination, whirled on Carstairs.

"Take that, you devil!"

He was in a delirium. His hand swung out. In another moment a blister would have been torn across Carstairs's cheek. But his hand stopped, and it was not Theresa's horrified cry that stopped it. It was the look he saw on Carstairs's face.

"Go ahead," the man said. "I don't blame you in the least."

As he spoke, he dropped his hands to his sides and turned his face toward Harrington and the sizzling iron.

"It's cooling off," he remarked. "Perhaps you had better heat it."

Harrington stared at him. The burning delirium oozed from his brain. It might be only a gesture of mock heroics Carstairs was making, but it was a magnificent one. No matter how thoroughly he deserved it, it was impossible to inflict torture on a man who faced it so coolly.

Harrington flung the iron to a far corner of the room. Of a sudden, he became conscious of the agony in his hand.

"Better let me attend to it," Carstairs said.

He walked out of the room, and Harrington made no move to detain him. The man seemed scarcely human. He heard a moan, and he saw Theresa clutching the wall for support. Now that the horrible ordeal was over, her nerves were giving way. He eased her to a chair and tried to make her comfortable. And then, unthinkingly, he kissed her. She smiled wanly and closed her eyes.

Presently Carstairs returned and applied a bandage to the injured hand. Harrington watched him in a daze, with a sense of mocking unreality. Whether he was inflicting torture or healing a wound, the man's fingers seemed equally deft.

"You took me by surprise, Harrington," he admitted, and his shadowy smile lit up his face again. "I never saw such a dare-devil stunt in my life."

Harrington's lips twisted into a cramped smile. It had not been dare-deviltry; it had been madness.

"And now," Carstairs added, "I'm at your service."

Harrington stared at him groggily. A few moments ago, he could have torn the man to pieces. Now he was rendered speechless and diffident.

"I suppose I deserve almost any kind of punishment your brain can conceive," Carstairs added. "Go ahead. I shan't complain."

He folded his arms and waited. Harrington did not move.

"I might add, though of course you won't believe me," Carstairs went on, "that I didn't have the remotest idea of hurting Miss Lanyard. I wanted to frighten her and make her talk."

"You chose a dreadful way of doing it," Harrington muttered.

"The only effective way. I knew it would make her tell, if she could. But a moment before you intervened in such a mad and heroic fashion, I had become convinced that she could not. I'm not apologizing. I'm no saint—far from it! And I know you won't believe a word of what I am saying."

Still Harrington did not speak. He felt ashamed of himself for an inclination to accept the man's words at their face value. He felt Carstairs, no matter what sort of villain he might be, would scorn lies and subterfuges.

Now Carstairs took out his watch. "In sixty seconds I shall walk out of this room, unless you choose to detain me," he announced.

Harrington did not detain him.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DEAD MAN'S HAT

THE forenoon sun shone into the library and glimmered on Seneca Whittaker's immaculate vest, which he was displaying to advantage by parting his coat and keeping his hands in his trousers pockets.

After a few hours' sleep, a small group was gathered in the library of the Marsh country house. It consisted of Martin Carmody, looking a little greyer than usual; Theresa, whose face still showed the strain of a terrifying night; Harrington, with his bandaged hand, whose ash-grey eyes seemed to say that life was all contradictions, and Whittaker and his indispensable assistant, the flint-jawed and thick-set Storm.

From the table, on which several articles were distributed, Whittaker took a black derby and looked at the inside band.

"Mr. Marsh's hat," he explained. "He was wearing it when he walked away from the house. Miss Lanyard and the housekeeper saw him, and they're positive he had his hat on. But an hour or so later, when Mr. Harrington looked into the mirror and saw Marsh sitting in the back of the car, the hat wasn't on him. It wasn't found in the car after the murder. It had disappeared somewhere."

He paused and twirled the brim of the hat between his fingers. Harrington recalled that he had stressed

the point of the missing hat, but he could not see that it was important.

"Storm thinks it may mean something," Whittaker went on, "and so I asked Mr. Carmody to come here and tell us how the hat got into his house."

Carmody jerked up his tall, slightly stooping figure and stared. The inevitable bang of grey hair fell down over his left temple, giving him a somewhat rakish look.

"My house!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Whittaker gently. "Storm happened to see it when he called at your house late last night to inquire if Miss Lanyard was there. He found it on the floor of the clothes closet just off the entrance hall. You can see it's been knocked about. Shame to treat a good hat like that!"

Carmody gaped and seemed unable to take his nervously flickering eyes from the hat.

"I'll be dashed!" he exclaimed. "I never saw that hat before, and I don't see how it got inside my house."

Whittaker gave him a disappointed look, then turned to Storm as if hoping for an inspiration.

"Did you see Marsh the day he was murdered?" Storm asked in his blunt way.

"I did not. I hadn't seen him for over a week."

Storm looked highly incredulous, but asked no further questions. Whittaker turned to the table and picked up a slender instrument with a wooden handle. A little gasp sounded in the room. Theresa had turned white at the sight of the implement. Harrington had brought it with him from the hilltop

hotel, and he had handed it to Whittaker with a brief account of the night's happenings.

"Anybody ever see this before?" Whittaker askéd, holding the instrument aloft and running his sluggish eyes over the gathering.

No one answered, but several pairs of eyes hung on the object.

"What is it?" Carmody asked.

"Only an ice pick," said Whittaker. "It turned up a short distance from where Marsh was murdered. Storm thinks it may mean something. The medical examiner, by the way, said Marsh was stabbed with some such thing as this."

Carmody shivered and a look of dread shone out of Theresa's eyes, but no one spoke a word. Just then Harrington recalled something Carstairs had said. Carstairs had advised him to ask Tarkin what he knew about the ice pick. As yet Harrington had had no opportunity to do so, for Tarkin had been nowhere in sight when he and Theresa left the old hilltop hotel.

With a despondent look, Whittaker returned the implement to the table.

"There's something else you may be interested in," he remarked. "Especially you, Mr. Harrington. You remember those tracks outside Luke Garbo's garage. They looked as if Garbo hadn't gone back to the garage after his last trip out to the car. As far as the tracks showed, he should still be standing there. Garbo himself couldn't explain it. He was stumped. But this morning Storm found the explanation."

Storm coughed and looked justifiably pleased.

"Did Garbo tell him?" Harrington asked, suddenly interested. The footprints outside the garage had been one of the most puzzling features of the mystery.

"No, I don't suppose Garbo realizes even now how it happened. Storm didn't talk with him this morning. He just watched him. As you know, people do all sorts of queer things when they're nervous. Once knew a man who had a habit of looking out the window and counting the bricks in the house across the street. Another man was always spelling street signs backward. Still another, when walking along the sidewalk, always stepped on the line between the squares of cement. Now, a man can do a thing like that without realizing it. That's the way with Garbo. It seems he has a habit of absent-mindedly walking in his own tracks."

Harrington gave him a long, puzzled look.

"Garbo did that very thing this morning," Whittaker went on. "He walked out to the gasolene pump to make some sort of repair, and then he evidently discovered he had forgotten his tools, so he went back and fetched them. He made his repairs, then walked back inside the garage. Storm, who's been wondering about him lately, had been watching him from the old shack across the road. As soon as Garbo was inside the garage, he went up to the gasolene pump. Now, the ground is still a little soggy. He could see Garbo's tracks, but there were only three lines of tracks. There should have been four. There was only one explanation. Garbo, when he went back to the garage the last time, had walked in the same tracks he made when

he went back to fetch his tools. Likely as not, he did the same thing on the day of the murder."

Harrington nodded. The explanation seemed very simple. For that matter, he had never suspected Garbo of having had a hand in the affair. In fact, he didn't suspect anyone. The deed itself was too mystifying to permit him to give much thought to the perpetrator.

He looked up to find Whittaker's dour eyes fixed on his face. The gloomy look was acccompanied by an equally gloomy smile.

"So that's that," said Whittaker. "We've cleared up one little side issue, thanks to Storm. Don't know what I'd do without him. But that doesn't get us very far. What we want to know is: Who killed Marsh?"

"And *how*?" said Harrington unthinkingly.

"Yes, how?" said Whittaker. "Can't you tell us, Mr. Harrington?"

Harrington smiled at the pointed question.

"Storm has a theory," Whittaker added, addressing the gathering at large. "And it simplifies the whole question. After all, there is just one thing that has made this case mysterious, and that's Mr. Harrington's account of how it happened. Storm says it couldn't have happened that way. He thinks Mr. Harrington is mistaken."

"That's a pleasant way of calling me a liar," Harrington remarked.

Storm gave him a hard, sarcastic look. Whittaker glanced down along the immaculate expanse of his double-buttoned vest.

"It's deeper than that," he said. "It's so deep

I can't see the bottom of it. Unless a man is a fool, he doesn't tell a lie that sounds like a lie. He tries to make it plausible. Now, Mr. Harrington, what you told us doesn't sound at all plausible. A liar could have done better. That proves—" He paused and looked helplessly at Storm. "What does it prove, Storm?"

But Storm seemed nonplussed. His hard, square face was a maze of wrinkles.

"Of course," said Whittaker casually, "there's such a thing as keeping one's mind a jump ahead of the other fellow's."

Storm brightened. "This is how it looks to me," he declared weightily. "Mr. Harrington here handed us an impossible yarn because we knew we would say to ourselves that only an innocent man would have the nerve to tell a story that sounded like a lie."

Whittaker appeared to consider.

"Maybe Storm is right. Storm generally is. It takes his kind of brain to see through a mess like this. Now, if Mr. Harrington deliberately told a lie that sounded so impossible that he hoped it would be accepted as the truth, then it follows that— What follows, Storm?"

"That Mr. Harrington is the murderer," said Storm glibly.

"Maybe so." Whittaker pondered. "Yes, maybe so, Storm. If you're right, then we have the answers to two questions: Who and how?"

"But there is still a big *why*?" a voice remarked.

With a start Harrington looked up. He could hardly believe his eyes. A man was standing at the door, broad of body and white of face, with

a dusky smile playing across his features. Roscoe Carstairs had entered so silently that no one had heard him.

Theresa started from her seat, then sat down again Whittaker gazed bewilderedly at the newcomer. It was Harrington who attended to the introductions.

"What was that you said?" Whittaker asked.

"Oh, nothing of importance. Only a stray thought that came to me as I stood here listening to the tail end of an illuminating conversation. You want to send Marsh's murderer to the chair, don't you?"

Whittaker stuck his thumbs into the armpits of his vest and nodded matter-of-factly. Carstairs came forward. He was in a long, grey, and very loose-fitting overcoat. His manner, it seemed to Harrington, was the height of insolence.

"Well," he drawled, "I don't need to explain the technical difficulties to you. It isn't enough to apprehend the culprit. If you do that, and nothing more, the most you can hope for is a verdict of manslaughter. If you find the murderer and determine the circumstances of the crime, you might obtain a verdict of second-degree murder. But to obtain a verdict in the first degree, you will have to do more. You will have to find the motive. Am I right?"

Whittaker exchanged glances with Storm and nodded again.

"You haven't found any motive, have you?" Carstairs asked.

"Not yet."

"Well, I have." Carstairs slapped his bulging overcoat pocket. It's here."

Several pairs of eyes stared at him in astonishment.

"Yes, it's here, in my pocket," Carstairs repeated. He sat down and lighted a cigar. "Thought you might be interested. Let's see—" He ran his eyes over the little group. "All the suspects are here, with one or two minor exceptions."

He chuckled. Harrington watched him intently, marvelling at the man's airy insouciance. One of the exceptions was, of course, Harry Stoddard. But who was the other? Luke Garbo? Tarkin?

"So it's possible," Carstairs went on, "that the murderer is in this room at present. Please don't look so shocked. I didn't come here to shock you, but to help you. Mr. Whittaker, if you will pardon the suggestion, you are not going deep enough into this matter. My private opinion is that the person who killed Marsh performed a public service. But the murder of Marsh wasn't an isolated occurrence. It was coupled with another murder—the murder of Dave Mooreland."

Whittaker started so violently that his thumbs slipped out of his arm-pits.

"Oh, yes, Mooreland was murdered," Carstairs went on "although all that's generally known is that he disappeared. He was murdered and I think the murderer is now in this room. Why was he murdered? I'll tell you. He was murdered for the same reason that Marsh was murdered. One motive governed both cases, and the motive is in my pocket."

The eyes of his listeners fixed on the bulge in

his overcoat, but Carstairs appeared in no hurry to exhibit the contents of his pocket.

"As I have said," he went on, "the person who killed Marsh performed a public service. But Mooreland—ah, that's different. There was a fine old man, gentle, lovable and kind. Now, I'm no moralist. I have little use for the conventions. I go my own way, and it isn't always the straight-and-narrow way. Just the same, I'd give a great deal to see Mooreland's murderer brought to justice."

Harrington marvelled at him. Just now there was a black look of vindictiveness on Carstairs's white face. A man of bewildering contradictions, certainly.

"Did you kill Marsh?" asked Whittaker unexpectedly.

"Wish I had," said Carstairs. and for an instant his face was almost wistful. "No, I can't claim credit for that. Marsh was killed by the same person who killed Mooreland, and for the same reason. You will understand in a moment. Now, just take a look at this."

He waved his soft, white hand at the window, commanding a view of a rather dreary landscape, with a mountaintop rising in the distance.

"Not a very idyllic landscape, is it? Oh, it's pleasant enough to-day, but generally it's raw, bleak and depressing. Years ago the locality sprang into sudden popularity. Nobody knows why such things happen. Clever manipulation by real-estate operators, perhaps! Anyway, a number of people built country homes here. Mooreland was one of the

first, and others followed. Then, owing to various circumstances, the neighbourhood suffered a decline. Most of the residents sold out and moved away, but a few remained. Just let your minds form a map of the district, and you will see that these few remaining residences form a cluster around the late home of David Mooreland. Why is that, I wonder?"

He looked at the group as if he expected an answer, but none came. Again his dusky smile came to his lips.

"The answer is here," he said, touching his coat pocket. "We lingered in this forsaken region—Marsh and Carmody and myself and one or two others—because Mooreland had something we wanted. We had our hearts set upon possessing it. Mooreland died—was murdered—but the rest of us hung around, hoping to attain our heart's desire. The object in question was hidden somewhere, or so we supposed. We searched everywhere, clandestinely, of course. We grew jealous and suspicious of one another. And then, just the other day, Marsh found it. I don't know how or where. And a few hours later, he was murdered."

His gaze, not unfriendly, fixed on Harrington. Then it moved to Carmody, sitting tense and erect, with his shock of grey hair falling down over his temple. At length, it rested on Theresa. Her face was strikingly white, and her eyes were fixed on the bulge over Carstairs's pocket as if a matter of life or death were centred there.

"And this morning," said Carstairs, "after a long and patient search, I found the object that has brought about two murders."

Harrington saw Theresa starting from her chair. Now her expression was one of overwhelming astonishment. She stared for a moment at Carmody, who seemed utterly stupefied. Harrington's gaze wandered back to Carstairs's bulging side pocket. The man seemed to take a grim delight in prolonging the suspense.

"Mr. Whittaker," he said, "are you good at reading faces?"

"No," said Whittaker, a humorous flicker in his dreary eyes, "but Storm is."

"Well, watch carefully," Carstairs added. "Somebody is going to feel very guilty when I reveal what is in my pocket. That means that he is going to try to look very innocent—and the harder he tries the guiltier he will look. Isn't that good psychology?"

"Well, try and see," said Storm curtly.

In an exasperatingly slow manner, Carstairs moved his hand to his overcoat pocket.

"Wait a minute," said Whittaker. "If Marsh was murdered on account of that thing you have in your pocket, how come that it isn't in the murderer's possession?"

Carstairs turned to him with his vague, shadowy smile.

"How do you know it isn't? How do you know I'm not the murderer? But, all joking aside, perhaps the object slipped away from the murderer. Anyway, here it is."

The tension in the room seemed to reach the bursting point as a parcel came out of his pocket, and it continued while Carstairs slowly removed

the wrapping. At length, while a tomblike silence prevailed, he revealed an article of rectangular shape, about the size of a small cigar box. It shone and sparkled with jewels and trimmings of gold.

"Here you are, gentlemen. Rather," he added, with a glance at Theresa, "lady and gentlemen."

The silence was like a suffocating thing.

"What is it?" asked Whittaker at length.

"Why, it's Pharaoh's coffin," said Carstairs.

Harrington stared at the object. It was a coffin in miniature, decked out with all the gorgeousness of which the old Pharaohs were fond. A gurgling sound made him raise his eyes. He saw a terrible strain over Carmody's face. The old gentleman had sat gazing at the little coffin with a fixed, stupefied expression. Of a sudden something seemed to burst in his eyes. He clutched at his heart. His grey head wagged from side to side and slumped to his breast.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LOOK OF GUILT

A PHYSICIAN had been hastily summoned, and Martin Carmody had been removed to one of the spare bedrooms in the house. It was not a serious seizure, the doctor had declared, merely a light heart attack. He added, however, that his patient must have absolute rest for several hours and that he could not be removed to his home until evening.

Harrington paced the library floor, casting an occasional glance at the coffin on the table. He had observed the tender solicitude with which Theresa had hovered about the stricken man, and he had seen Carmody's looks of mute affection. Yet Carstairs had hinted that Carmody lied when he said Theresa was his daughter. He had even suggested that her life might be in danger. There was certainly a contradiction somewhere.

For several minutes, not a word had been spoken in the library. Carstairs, with his brooding smile on his white face, occupied a negligent position in an arm-chair. Whittaker, a long, rangy, untidy figure except for his white vest, stood at the window smoking a cigar. Storm was consulting his notebook.

"Well," said Whittaker, turning from the window and fixing his dour eyes on his assistant, "who was the guilty-looking one?"

Storm closed his notebook and methodically put it in his pocket.

"Mr. Carmody certainly *looked* guilty," he declared, craftily emphasizing the last word but one.

Whittaker nodded approvingly in Harrington's direction.

"Storm is deep. He says Mr. Carmody *looked* guilty. He doesn't say he is actually guilty. Tell us what you mean, Storm."

"Well, I was watching the whole room, Mr. Carmody looked guilty enough, but somebody else looked all-fired innocent. Too innocent," Storm added sagaciously.

"See?" said Whittaker solemnly. "That's Storm. He has eyes and a brain, and he uses both. Couldn't get along without him."

Harrington smiled. Whittaker was exhibiting his assistant's talents with the air of one exhibiting a blue-ribboned bulldog.

"Well, Storm," he now added, "who was the one that looked too innocent?"

"Oh, we won't mention names just now. Anyhow, it wasn't a fair test. Mr. Carstairs prepared them for what was coming."

"Even so," came Carstairs's voice from the depths of the arm-chair, "the result seemed fairly conclusive." He chuckled agreeably. "Oh, come now, Storm. There were only six of us in the room, counting yourself and Mr. Whittaker. You two, by virtue of your official positions, are safely outside the range of suspicion. So the person you say looked too innocent must be either Miss Lanyard, Mr. Harrington or myself. Which one was it?"

Storm shook his head stubbornly and, walking up to the table, picked up the miniature coffin.

"Storm never says a thing unless he is absolutely sure," Whittaker explained. "That's a characteristic of a great mind."

Harrington looked at him. There was a sly little twinkle in his dour eyes.

"You didn't tell us anything new, Mr. Carstairs," the district attorney went on. "Storm has suspected for some time that Mooreland was murdered. There was a rumpus between him and Carmody toward the last, wasn't there, Storm?"

"Yes, a bad one. Oh, I guess Carmody killed the old man. There are several things make me think so. Can't prove it, though, so what's the use talking? Anyhow, I don't agree with you, Mr. Carstairs. I don't think the same goof did for Mooreland and Marsh. That is to say, I think he had anything to do with the Marsh murder."

Carstairs shrugged as if Storm's opinions were of no great importance. The detective was inspecting the little coffin.

"It's locked," he remarked. "Good, strong lock, too."

"Yes," said Carstairs, "and the key is still missing. I suppose, Mr. Whittaker, you will turn it over intact to the executor of the Mooreland estate? It's just possible that he has the key."

"I'll look into it. So Mooreland left an estate, did he? I never heard of it."

"Few people have, but it's so. He left a considerable estate. That coffin, by the way, contains a million dollars worth of precious stones."

The box dropped with a loud crash from Storm's fingers.

"It might be advisable," Carstairs added casually, "to keep the box under lock and key until you can get in touch with the executor. Well, gentlemen, I trust I have given you a few valuable hints. Now, if I can't assist you further, I shall take a little walk. Good morning."

Storm's astounded gaze was still riveted on the little coffin. Whittaker looked a trifle uncertain, but he said nothing. With a little swagger that might have been unconscious, Carstairs left the room, and Harrington stared after him, brows puckering.

"Gosh!" Storm muttered thickly. "A million dollars!"

Whittaker stood at the window and watched Carstairs climb into his car and drive off.

"He said he was going to take a walk," he remarked. "He didn't walk far. Well, I suppose some men get their exercise at the wheel. What about you, Storm? Don't you feel you need a bit of exercise, too?"

Storm lifted his heavy eyes from the little coffin.

"Exercise? Not me! I get enough of it."

"But a little spin might do you good. My car is outside, you know. It isn't much on looks, but I'll bet it's as fast as the one Carstairs drives."

Storm gaped at him for a moment, and then a shrewd look came into his eyes.

"Right," he said, grinning. "I need a little air."

He walked out with his heavy tread, and, in a few moments, Harrington saw him drive off at a

rather frantic speed. His eyes narrowed. He had been aware of a furtive interplay of glances between Storm and his superior.

"Where is Storm going?" he asked.

Whittaker pursed his lips mysteriously.

"You can never tell about Storm. He is deep. Now, it's just possible that he's decided to keep an eye on Carstairs."

Harrington's lips twitched. Unless he had been mistaken, the suggestion to keep an eye on Carstairs had come from Whittaker himself. In fact, Storm had been rather slow to grasp it.

"I see. It was Carstairs who looked too innocent."

"Maybe so. You can never tell what Storm thinks. But I'm afraid he's off on a wild-goose chase this time. However, the fresh air will do him good."

"What did you think of Carstairs's surprise? Was the test conclusive?"

"*H'm.* Well, as far as it went, I suppose it was. Too bad that one or two other people weren't present, though?"

"Luke Garbo, Stoddard, and Samuel Tarkin?"

Whittaker looked down at the coffin and did not answer directly.

"There was one queer thing I noticed," he remarked. "Mr. Carstairs looked as if he wasn't satisfied with the test. He seemed disappointed."

Harrington nodded. He had conceived the same impression, though in a very vague form.

"But it all comes back to this," said Whittaker gloomily. "No matter how innocent or guilty some people may look, there's only one person who could

have committed the crime, and that's you, Mr. Harrington.

Harrington started, though the idea was by no means a novel one, but, in a moment, a smile came to his lips.

"Want to place me under arrest, Mr. Whittaker?"

"We'll wait for the inquest this afternoon. By the way, seen Luke Garbo lately?"

"Not since you patronized his cigar counter the other night."

Whittaker lifted the box gingerly from the table.

"Too bad Carstairs didn't tell us where he found it. I suppose he had his reasons. Speaking of Garbo, there's a man playing in hard luck. Saw him this morning. He says business is so rotten that he hardly bothers to open his place any more."

Harrington waited for more, but evidently Whittaker had finished.

"But all you had against Garbo was those queer tracks, and they have been explained."

"Yes, so it seems. I must ask Storm what he thinks about that. Anyhow, as I said before, there's only one man could have done that job, and that's—" He mumbled the rest, and his dour eyes slanted down to the articles on the table, the ice pick, Marsh's hat, and the little coffin. "One thing is missing—the glove button," he said with a sombre grin.

"Oh, yes, the button." Harrington's thoughts suddenly took a different trend, but they were interrupted by footsteps outside the door, which had been left open a few inches. They paused, and the person approaching seemed to hesitate. Harrington

looked around him and was surprised to discover that Whittaker was nowhere in sight.

The door was pushed wide, and in the opening stood Tarkin with his slippery gaze and his unwholesome grin that revealed a wealth of golden teeth.

"What do you want?" Harrington curtly inquired.

The blackmailer came forward with his mincing step.

"You have forgotten that you owe me two grand?"

"Correct," said Harrington frigidly, recalling the circumstances of the bargain. At that time a million, if he had a million to pay, would not have seemed too high a price for Tarkin's assistance. Well, he had promised, and a promise was a promise even when made to a disgusting creature like Tarkin. He viewed the man with curiosity, however. "What became of you after you cut me loose?"

"I beat it," said Tarkin. "That place is none too healthy for me. Carstairs might have caught me, and that wouldn't have been so good."

Harrington regarded him steadily, a number of curious circumstances flashing through his mind.

"What would Carstairs have done to you if he had found you?"

"What wouldn't he have done? He'd have given me the ju-jitsu treatment for one thing, and that's not so good."

Harrington knew from experience that it was not.

"And he might have killed me besides," Tarkin added, showing his golden molars in a crooked grin. "Well, do I get the two grand?"

"One moment." Still wondering what might have become of Whittaker, Harrington picked up the ice pick from the table. "Ever see this before, Tarkin?"

The blackmailer regarded the instrument attentively. His rheumy eyes narrowed.

"Couldn't say. It might be the one, and again it might not."

"Which one?"

"Well, one time Carstairs went after me with his bag of ju-jitsu tricks, and I went for him with an ice pick. He took it away from me and— Well, it wasn't so good!" Tarkin's thoughts seemed to run back over a painful scene.

Harrington considered. So that was the episode Carstairs had had in mind when he suggested that Tarkin could tell something about the ice pick. He remembered, too, that Carstairs had seemed puzzled that he should stress such a trifling point.

"When was that?" he asked.

"Oh, a couple of weeks ago. I'm not saying it was this particular ice pick, you understand. I don't see that it cuts any ice, anyhow." Tarkin laughed at his little joke.

"So Carstairs took the pick away from you. And kept it, of course?"

"I suppose so. Say what has all this got to do with my two grand?"

Harrington gazed thoughtfully at the instrument. If there had ever been any dark-red stains on it, they had been destroyed when Carstairs heated it

in the stove. He put it down and reached for his cheque-book.

"I'll take it in cash," Tarkin declared. "Cheques aren't so good. Anyhow," with a shrewd grin, "you'd have to sign a name to it that isn't known in these parts. No, I'll take the cash."

"Yes, and you will wait for it." Harrington put the cheque-book back in his pocket. "I don't carry much cash around with me."

"Look here," he said surlily, "you aren't going to welch?"

"You will get your two thousand, and I hope you choke on it. Now clear out."

Whimpering, the blackmailer shuffled out of the room. As the door closed behind him, another door opened—a small, closet door in a corner of the library. The long, rangy figure of Whittaker appeared in the opening.

"Wish Storm had been here," he said. "He'd have learned a whole lot from that. So that little rat is blackmailing you?"

"Oh, not exactly." Harrington explained. He had already given a brief account of last night's happenings, but he had omitted Tarkin's part in them. "So, you see, it isn't a case of blackmail."

"I see." Whittaker came close up to him. "I wonder what name you would have signed to the cheque if you'd made it out."

"Does it matter? You might not know it if I told you."

"Maybe not. Did you believe what Tarkin told you?"

"About the ice pick? Well, it didn't occur to me to doubt him."

Whittaker stuck his hands in his pockets and lowered his head.

"I don't suppose he weighs more than a hundred pounds." He appeared to be talking to himself. "And he hops around like a straw in the wind."

"Yes? What of it?"

Whittaker seemed to come out of a reverie. He smiled sombrely.

"For a man who may be arrested for murder before the day is over, you are awfully slow to see the drift in the other direction. Now, this is how Storm would look at it. *If*—and it's a big *if*—somebody slipped into the car while you were driving it, it must have been a man as small and light as Tarkin."

"No," said Harrington, shaking his head, "Tarkin couldn't have done it. It would have to be a man as small and light as a kitten, and even a kitten couldn't have got in with three of the doors locked on the inside and all the windows closed."

"I see you are going to be a good witness for the prosecution."

"Can't help it," Harrington said grimly. "Besides there is still the mystery of how Marsh got into the car."

"Yes," said Whittaker, "there is—provided you told the truth."

CHAPTER XIX

SOMEONE BEHIND THE DOOR

THE inquest was a rather colourless affair. It was held in the library, and Whittaker sat in the late Christopher Marsh's chair and looked rather ill at ease at finding himself in a position of such dignity. The medical examiner was there to report his findings, and among the others present were Harrington, Carstairs, Theresa and Storm.

The session was a preliminary one. Whittaker explained. They would hear two or three witnesses, and then an adjournment would be taken till the following day, when he hoped that Carmody, now resting in one of the bedrooms upstairs, would be able to appear. He was also anxious to hear what Mrs. Marsh might have to say, but the widow, who had been a semi-invalid for years, had collapsed upon hearing of the murder, and her physician had ordered another twenty-four hours of absolute rest. Too, Whittaker had been unable to get in touch with Marsh's lawyer, who might have several illuminating things to report and whom he hoped to have on hand in the morning.

It was with a sense of incongruity that Harrington again told the story of the unforgettable motor drive up to the desolate hilltop. He had a feeling that he was telling a story that could not be believed. At times, he almost doubted the truth of it himself. The

fact that there was no cross-examination only seemed to brand the story as too absurd for serious thought.

Yet, while he was telling it, he caught a most curious expression on Whittaker's face. It was his impression that the district attorney's thoughts were wandering and pursuing a course of their own and that somewhere along that course there was a light. Certainly, for a moment or two, there was a peculiar glow in the dour face. And, at the end, Whittaker asked a very strange question.

"Let me see," he said, "isn't there a bridge somewhere along the road you took that afternoon—a short bridge spanning a stream?"

Harrington could not remember, nor could he see why Whittaker should ask such a question. A thousand bridges would not explain the mysterious things that had happened on that ride.

"There is," said Storm, who seemed more familiar with the territory than his chief. "It's called the Crooked Creek bridge."

"Crooked Creek, eh? Wish I had your memory, Storm. Well, now, let me see? Mr. Harrington tells me he was going between thirty and forty miles an hour. How long would it take him to get to that bridge after he left Luke Garbo's garage?"

"Oh, about forty or fifty minutes." Storm looked as if he too was at a loss to see the drift of his chief's questions.

Whittaker considered, and again there was a queer glow about his face.

"It fits together. Mr. Harrington has told us that he had been on the way about three quarters of an hour when he suddenly saw Mr. Marsh in

the car. That would be about the time he crossed the Crooked Creek bridge."

He looked around him, and was met by baffled glances everywhere. No one could understand what the Crooked Creek bridge had to do with the Marsh murder mystery.

"Well, doc, let's hear from you," he said suddenly.

While the medical examiner was still making his report, he called Storm over to the window and spoke to him in an undertone. Evidently, he was saying something of a startling nature, for Storm looked acutely puzzled. In the end, he took his hat and coat and went out, presumably on an errand connected with the Crooked Creek bridge.

Carstairs followed the medical examiner, but the questions put to him seemed perfunctory. He was soon dismissed, and he walked out with his customary swaggering gait. Theresa was questioned next, but it was apparent that Whittaker's thoughts were still wandering.

"That'll be all for to-day," he announced. "I wanted to ask Luke Garbo a few questions, but he nailed up a notice on his garage door saying he has gone away for the day and won't be back till to-morrow morning. I wanted to hear from Mr. Carmody, too, but he is too ill. Then there is Mrs. Marsh. Her physician tells me I mustn't subject her to any strain till to-morrow. So I guess we'll call it a day."

He got up and fixed his sombre eyes on the gorgeous little coffin in front of him on the table.

"Pesky thing," he mumbled. "I don't like the

responsibility of it. Wish Marsh's lawyer would hurry up and get here. It's no joke to have to look after a million dollars worth of stones."

He glanced up and found Theresa's eyes riveted on the box. She turned away and looked suddenly confused. He slipped the box into his pocket.

"Oh, Miss Lanyard, you're a nurse, aren't you?" A furtive little smile flickered in the wrinkles beside his mouth. "Well, would you mind going up and seeing how Mr. Carmody is getting on?"

She flushed slightly at the pretence that she was still regarded as a nurse, and left the room. The others, including the official stenographer, having gone, he and Harrington were alone in the library.

"Well, we didn't get very far to-day," Whittaker mumbled.

Harrington could not refrain from touching upon a detail that had aroused his curiosity.

"I suppose Storm is on his way to Crooked Creek bridge?"

"Yes, Storm had a bright idea. He has them often."

"I thought this one came from you?"

"Oh, Storm would have seen it if I hadn't. Even so, it's only a hunch. There may not be anything to it. It's odd, though, that Marsh appeared in the car just about the time you were crossing the bridge."

"I don't see the connection. And I didn't think you believed my story."

"I'm not sure I do. I'll see what Storm thinks when he comes back. Anyhow, this hunch Storm is working on has nothing to do with the actual murder. It only explains, if it explains anything,

how Marsh got into the car—*if* he got into the car as you say he did."

"But he didn't climb into the car over a bridge."

"We'll see. By the way, has the car been cleaned since the murder?"

"I think not, but it got a thorough soaking that night."

"I don't mean an outside cleaning. I mean an inside one. Let's go and see."

Increasingly bewildered, Harrington followed him to the garage and turned on the light. Whittaker opened one of the rear doors and carefully examined the space between the two seats, also the rear seat cushion. The examination took nearly a quarter of an hour, and he did not speak until they were in the library again.

"Marsh wasn't in the habit of greasing the soles of his shoes, was he?"

Harrington gaped at the astonishing question.

"Why on earth should he do that?"

Whittaker's face was an unreadable enigma.

"I must ask Storm what he thinks about that. I guess Storm won't be back for hours, though. He's got a long job. Well, how is the patient, Miss Lanyard?"

Theresa had just returned to the library.

"Mr. Carmody is very restless," she reported. "He is anxious to get home, too. He is never comfortable in a strange bed. He lives only a mile from here. Is there any objection?"

Whittaker scratched his chin thoughtfully. Consciously or unconsciously, his hand went to the pocket containing the coffin.

"No objection, but don't you think he ought to rest a little longer?"

"The doctor has just left. He told Mr. Carmody he was strong enough to leave any time."

"Oh, but doctors don't know everything. Just let him rest an hour or so longer. By the way, did you happen to look in on Mrs. Marsh while you were upstairs?"

"I looked in, but that's all. She was sleeping quietly."

Whittaker nodded approvingly. "Then she must be getting well. Nothing like having a good nurse."

She gazed at him uneasily, saw the furtive twinkle in his eyes, and reddened a little.

"Oh," said Whittaker, as if just recalling something, "I heard a little while ago that Mr. Carmody is your father. Is that right?"

Harrington waited tensely for her answer. Considering the simplicity of the question, it was long in coming.

"Not quite," she said with evident reluctance. "I was an orphan and Mr. Carmody brought me up. He has been like a father to me. Though I haven't made my home with him in recent years, I think of him as a father, love him as a father, and I feel I owe a great debt to him."

Her voice shook a little, but her gaze was straight and clear, and there could be no mistaking the sincerity in her tone. Harrington nodded thoughtfully to himself. Carstairs had told the literal truth, but no more. Perhaps the literal truth was all he knew. He had never looked into Theresa's heart, where the real truth was to be found.

"Better go back to him," Whittaker gently suggested, "and tell him not to be in too great a hurry to go home."

Casting a long, wondering glance on him, she left the room. Whittaker touched his pocket again. The coffin appeared to give him great concern. He rocked thoughtfully on his heels, and his eyes wandered off into space.

"Wonder why Carmody is in such a hurry to get home," he mumbled.

Harrington gave him a puzzled glance. Carmody's anxiety to get into his own bed seemed a natural thing.

"Well," said Whittaker, glancing out of the window into the late afternoon shadows, "I wouldn't be surprised if things came to a head to-night."

"You mean when Storm returns from Crooked Creek bridge?"

"No, when Carmody gets back to his own house."

Harrington stared at him perplexedly. Whittaker had been full of strange ideas all day. It had begun, it seemed, when Carstairs came to the house and surrendered the little coffin to him. But then any man would act strangely if he suddenly became the custodian of a million dollars worth of jewels.

"I need a little nap," Whittaker declared. "Guess I'll try the couch in the drawing-room. Wish you would call me when Mr. Carmody gets ready to leave."

Harrington nodded absently and wondered what was going on in the district attorney's mind.

"Wish you would take care of this in the meantime," said Whittaker casually, and pulled the coffin

from his pocket. "It would keep me awake, and I certainly need a few winks."

He handed the gorgeous box to Harrington as carelessly as if it had been only a cheap trinket. Harrington took it dazedly. Of all the strange things Whittaker had done, this was by far the strangest. It seemed madness, but perhaps there was method in it.

"But——"

"Don't argue, please." The district attorney yawned. "Just slip it in your pocket. By the way, have you a gun?"

Harrington shook his head in an astounded way. The pistol which had belonged to his late employer had vanished during the exciting events at the hilltop hotel.

"Well, take this." Whittaker handed him his own automatic. "Anybody who has a million dollars worth of jewels in his pocket ought to carry a gun."

Harrington looked about the room as he slipped the weapon into his pocket. Shadows were gathering in the corners. Outside, on the lawn and among the trees, a fog was rising. In the dusk, he imagined he saw a knowing smile on the district attorney's face.

"Well," he said with a long breath, "I'm glad nobody saw you hand me the coffin."

Whittaker gave a throaty little chuckle.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that. Don't forget to call me when Mr. Carmody gets ready to leave."

He walked away slowly. Even before he reached the door he was almost blotted out by the oncreeping shadows. Harrington remained standing in the

dusk. He was tingling queery. The box in his pocket seemed to have assumed monstrous size and weight. A million in precious stones! And Whittaker had handed it for safe-keeping to the one who was under suspicion of murder!

He lighted a cigarette, gazed thoughtfully at the flickering flame of the match until it died, then looked sharply into the shadowy corners. What on earth was Whittaker's idea? The long, dour district attorney was certainly moving in mysterious ways. And that was a curious remark he had made just before he went out. "I wouldn't be too sure," he had said in reply to Harrington's remark that no one had witnessed the transfer of the coffin. The words had sounded vaguely significant.

Harrington reached out his hand to switch on the library lamp, then changed his mind. For a reason not quite clear to himself, he preferred to remain in the gloom with the treasure he was guarding. His eyes went around the panelled walls. They seemed to be growing darker every moment. He gazed at the windows with their heavy curtains and into the night gathering outside. Last of all, his eyes fixed on the door to the little study where he had played at his fictitious rôle of secretary.

In a moment, he stiffened. A grim smile crept up from the corners of his mouth. He knew now what the district attorney had meant. Whittaker must have sharp ears and eyes.

The study door was open a crack, and someone was standing behind it!

CHAPTER XX

MURDER INSURANCE

A SLIGHT squeak had come from the study door, and then the sound of someone catching his breath. It was very still now, but Harrington imagined he saw a pair of eyes peering out through the narrow crack. Whose eyes?

Again he felt that sharp, tingling sensation. Of a sudden, his centre of consciousness seemed to have moved to the pocket that contained the little coffin. At least one murder, and perhaps two, had been perpetrated because of the contents of that gorgeous box. Would it inspire still another murderous deed? And was it the murderer of Marsh who was now lurking behind the study door?

His brain worked by leaps and flashes, stimulated by the mysterious presence behind the door and by the dynamic something that hung in the air. He hesitated briefly while he touched the pocket that contained the coffin and the other pocket that contained the automatic. Should he take an aggressive stand at once, or should he wait and let the man behind the door show his hand?

In the next moment, the question was answered for him. Almost soundlessly, the door came open. Someone stepped out, a shadow moving among shadows. The newcomer walked with a step so light that Harrington knew at once who it was.

"What do you want, Tarkin?" he asked sharply. The dramatic thrill was leaving him. Only a sense of disgust remained. He had been keyed up to something totally different from an encounter with a blackmailer.

"*Sh!*" Tarkin whispered. "Want to disturb everybody in the house? And you don't play any cute tricks on me this time, Harrington. I've got the drop on you. See?"

There was a small, greyish gleam in the gloom, and it pointed straight to Harrington. It was too late now to reach for his pistol. Somehow, it had not occurred to him that he might need it when he saw that the intruder was only Tarkin. One did not associate gun-play with the slimy ways of a blackmailer. And, even now, the pistol in Tarkin's hand did not seem as menacing as it would have seemed in the hand of someone else.

"Oh, you've changed your tactics, I see. Well, what are you offering for sale this time?"

"Not a thing. I've come to collect."

"But I told you——"

"Yeah, I know what you told me, that you didn't have the cash. You've got it now, or something just as good. I'll take that."

He crept forward a few steps, and Harrington's hand went to the coffin. Keeping his eyes on the greyish glint of steel, he edged cautiously toward the desk.

"Stay right there," Tarkin advised, speaking in a bronchial whisper. "Never mind the light. We can talk business in the dark. And don't talk too loud. Somebody might hear us, and that

wouldn't be so good. Just behave nicely and hand over that pretty little box in your pocket."

Harrington laughed heartily at the suggestion.

"It's no joke," Tarkin warned him. "I'm out for the big touch to-night. There's a million dollars worth of ice in that coffin, and I'm going to have it."

"Really, Tarkin? You're an ambitious little crook, aren't you? A cool million, eh? You astonish me."

"Ah, can the wisecracks. And get this, Harrington. I'm going to have that box, even if I have to take it off your dead body."

There was a new note now in Tarkin's speech. He spoke as if he meant to have the box at all costs, even if he had to commit murder for it. Harrington's hand moved cautiously toward his hip pocket.

"No, you don't!" Tarkin snarled, and he leaped closer and shoved the barrel against Harrington's midriff. "Steady now. Not a move, or I drill you. Just take it easy and——"

The words ended in a baffled whine. Very quickly, Harrington had dropped to the floor, seized the blackmailer about the knees, and pulled his legs from under him. He hit the floor with a thud, and Harrington wrenched the pistol from his hand.

"Get up, Tarkin," he directed, "and answer a few questions."

With whimpers and mutters the blackmailer scrambled to his feet. Harrington reached out and switched on the library reading lamp. It diffused a reddish glow within a narrow space and left the rest of the library in shadow.

"Sit there!" Harrington ordered, indicating a chair. Tarkin obeyed surlily. There was a black, treacherous look in his unwholesome face. "What do you know about this box?" Harrington demanded.

"I know the Mooreland diamonds are in it."

"The—what diamonds?"

"The Mooreland diamonds. They belonged to David Mooreland."

With a look of surprise, Harrington searched his sallow face.

"Ridiculous! Mooreland never had any diamonds. He was honest and poor. Where would he— Oh, well, let it pass. How did you know I had the box?"

"I've got eyes and ears, haven't I?"

"I see. You have a great talent for appearing in unexpected places, and you're making the most of it. It's easy for a runt like you to slip in and out. I suppose you were somewhere in the offing when Carstairs brought the box to the house."

"Who?" asked Tarkin, his rheumy eyes opening wide.

"Carstairs, of course."

The blackmailer stared at him a moment longer, then laughed.

"Ah, don't kid me. Carstairs didn't bring that box. Say, you make me laugh. Carstairs. He-he!"

Harrington regarded him narrowly, puzzled by his demeanour.

"Carstairs brought it, nevertheless," he declared.

"Yeah? Sure it wasn't Santa Claus?" He shrugged his bony shoulders. "Makes no difference who brought it, though. I know you've got it.

I was right in the next room when Whittaker handed it to you. I can see it peeping out of your pocket, for that matter. Say, that's another funny thing—Whittaker handing you that box. Can't make it out. I thought he had it doped out that you were the murderer."

Harrington dropped the blackmailer's pistol into the desk drawer and locked it. He turned and surprised a shrewd, calculating look in Tarkin's face.

"Well, Tarkin, what was the idea? Did you really think you were going to get away with a million dollars worth of diamonds?"

"Stranger things have happened, and it looked like a good chance. It was worth trying, anyhow."

He spoke resignedly, but Harrington knew that his mind was working frantically to find a way to gain possession of the box.

"Who sent you here?" Harrington suddenly inquired.

"Sent me? Why, nobody. I'm working on my own."

The vague suspicion left Harrington's mind almost as quickly as it had come.

"Look here," said Tarkin mincingly, an ingratiating grin spreading across his unwholesome face, "suppose we get together on this. You don't want anything to happen to those sparklers, do you? Suppose somebody should come along and grab them from you—somebody who's slicker than I am and not half so honest."

"Honest?" Harrington echoed, laughing despite his disgust.

"Yes, honest. Look here, did I ever cheat you?

Didn't you always get value for your money? As a matter of fact, you've got the value and I've got promises. That's all—promises and a few kicks. Now, there's a million dollars worth of shiners in that pretty little box, and they don't belong to anybody in particular. No, sir, they don't belong to anybody."

Harrington stared into his sallow face. The blackmailer appeared in great earnest, but his shifty eyes were constantly alert.

"Oh, rot, Tarkin! You can't tell me that a million dollars worth of jewels are kicking around without a owner. Didn't they belong to Marsh?"

"They did not! Not any more than they belong to you or me or Carstairs. They did belong to Mooreland, but he's dead."

"Nonsense, Tarkin. Mooreland was a poor man."

"Was he? Well, that's what most people thought, and it suited Mooreland to have them think so. He wasn't advertising his wealth. Even some of his heirs didn't know that he was worth over a million. By the way," and Tarkin's shifty eyes narrowed shrewdly, "aren't you one of his heirs?"

Harrington started. Much as he loathed the blackmailer, he was growing interested. Tarkin was talking like a man who knew.

"I never saw the will," he declared, "and I never heard of it. I doubt if there was one."

"There was. A funny kind of will, and you were named in it along with several others. You see, I knew your real name—the name that appeared in the will."

"You seem to know a good many things."

"I do. Now, just think back a bit. Didn't David Mooreland tell you once that he would remember you in his will?"

Harrington reflected for a few moments.

"I believe he did. I was in China at the time. Knowing he was a poor man, I regarded it as a joke, and afterward I forgot all about it."

"Well, some of the others didn't forget, and they knew Mooreland was no pauper. As I said, it was a funny sort of will—a kind of murder insurance."

"What?"

"Murder insurance. That's what it was."

Harrington's thoughts went back a few years and resurrected dim recollections of a letter he had received one day from David Mooreland. It was a most curious letter. He had wondered at the time whether Mooreland's mind was weakening or whether he was developing a grotesque sense of humour in his old age. Afterward, he had completely forgotten all about it.

"I see you remember," said Tarkin, watching him craftily. "I guess you remember, too, what sort of man Mooreland was. Some people thought he was batty in the head. It wasn't that, but he was certainly a queer old jackass, with all sorts of funny notions in his head and——"

"He was a man of honour," Harrington cut in, resenting the blackmailer's crude references to the man who had been his father's dearest friend.

"I didn't say he wasn't, did I? I only said he was queer. As queer as they make 'em. Guess he

came of a queer family, for his brother was queer, too. David Mooreland's queer streak didn't show till he was well past sixty. It was a funny sort of fear—fear of being murdered."

Harrington's brows went up. Another dim memory was knocking at his brain.

"I guess you'd call it an obsession," Tarkin went on, his rheumy eyes fixed on the bulge over Harrington's pocket. "Anyhow, it was a crazy sort of fear, and it grew on him as he got older. Some people think it started when an old aunt of his was murdered. Whether that was true or not, the fear haunted him night and day. He put extra locks on his doors. He never went out on the streets without keeping one eye over his shoulder to see if anybody was chasing him with a knife. Queer, eh? And not so good for a man's nerves. And the queerest part of it all was that there was no reason on earth for his fear. He was the last man in the world to make enemies.

"You see, David Mooreland was a gentleman if ever there was one. I'm no gentleman, but I can spot one a mile off. Yes, sir, he was too much a gentleman for his own good. His friends made money, and some of 'em didn't care how they made it, but David Mooreland made just enough for a comfortable living. And, as I said, there was no reason why anybody should want to hurt a hair on his head. In spite of that, he was the most scared man alive. Didn't have a moment's peace. Worried all the time and——"

"Come to the point," Harrington curtly interrupted. Somehow, it seemed as if old Mooreland's

name were being defamed by contact with the blackmailer's lips.

"I'm there now," said Tarkin smoothly. "Things came to a point one day when a man whose name nobody ever found out stepped off a boat at one of the Manhattan piers and went to Mooreland's house with a package in his pocket. Nobody knows whether or not he paid duty on the package. If he did, he must have paid a stiff amount. Anyhow, he handed the package to Mooreland and said it came from Mooreland's brother William, who had been living in Amsterdam for twenty years. That's all he said, and David Mooreland never saw him again.

"Well, the old boy had the surprise of his life when he opened the package. There was a pretty little box in it. Yes, sir, the same box you've got in your pocket. Mooreland opened it and almost keeled over when he saw it was crammed with diamonds. It seems William had been in the diamond business in Amsterdam. His brother David was his only relative, and so, when he felt death coming on, he did things the simplest way. He packed a million's worth of rocks in the box and sent them over by a trusted friend. And so David Mooreland became a millionaire."

Harrington was listening intently now. He was learning of a strange chapter in the life of a man whose kindliness and sweetness of character had made a profound and lasting impression upon him.

"Just try to picture the old boy with a million on his hands," Tarkin went on. "He had lived in fear before, and for no reason. Now there was a

reason. People had been murdered for much less than a million. The old gentleman worked himself into a cold perspiration. He imagined murderers were lying in wait for him everywhere. It was all foolishness, of course.

"Nobody knew he had the rocks except the man who brought them over. But Mooreland thought there was just a chance somebody might find out. He got panicky. The sane thing, of course, would have been to take the box to a safe-deposit vault, but people don't do sane things when they're panicky. And so Mooreland just sat there and looked at his diamonds, with cold shivers running all over him, and wishing the pesky things were on the bottom of the river.

"That's where they might have landed, too. Mooreland was scared enough to do any crazy thing. But he thought it over, and a better idea came to him. He was getting old; he wouldn't live to enjoy his pile for long. Besides, he had no relatives he could leave it to, only a few friends, and he was very fond of those friends. He was tempted to divide the diamonds among them right away, but then he thought of a still better idea—and that was murder insurance."

Tarkin chuckled and rubbed his long, greedy hands.

"Now, being a queer man, he worked the thing in a queer way. It wasn't such a bad way at that, if he had only been a little more careful. This was his idea. The million in diamonds was to be divided among his friends after his death, but there was a string tied to it. If he should die a violent death

—if he should be murdered, that is—the division wouldn't take place until the murderer had been found, and the one who found him would get one half of the diamonds as his share, and the other half would be split up among the rest of the heirs.

"Pretty good, eh? You see how he was protecting himself all around. He knew that prospective heirs get impatient sometimes, that now and then they feel an awful temptation to hasten things along with a knife or a dose of poison. Under this kind of arrangement, they wouldn't be so likely to do that. It would be to their interest to let Mooreland die a natural death. What's more, each one would be a sort of bodyguard and would take it on himself to see that nobody went gunning for Mooreland. And anybody that might feel tempted to bump him off would be discouraged by the fact that there would be a reward of half a million for the one who nabbed the murderer. Yes, Mooreland fixed it up pretty neatly. There was just one bad hitch.

"You see, if he went to work and made a will with such provisions in it, a lot of people would say he was crazy. That might give somebody a chance to contest the thing. Besides, Mooreland had a horror of publicity, and the newspapers, if they got wind of a will like that, would yell themselves hoarse. That wasn't the worst of it, though.

"What Mooreland liked least of all about the arrangement was that some people might read between the lines and think he was afraid of his friends. Maybe he was doubtful of one or two, but he realized he might be wrong, and he didn't

want to do anybody an injustice. The upshot of it all was that he didn't make a will at all, except what you might call an unofficial one. And he appointed an unofficial executor. That is, he took the pretty little box, with the million's worth of diamonds in it, and handed to to Christopher Marsh."

"What?" Harrington exclaimed, incredulously.

"Can you beat it?" Tarkin snickered disgustedly. "Yes, he handed Marsh the diamonds and made him his unofficial executor. If Mooreland died a natural death, Marsh was to divide the diamonds evenly among the heirs. If he was murdered, Marsh was to keep the diamonds until the murderer was found, and the person who found him would get half. If the murderer wasn't found, Marsh would keep all."

Harrington stared at him with open mouth.

"Marsh, of all persons!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Marsh, of all persons! Don't ask me to explain. What Mooreland didn't know about human nature would fill all these books." Tarkin made a comprehensive sweep with his hand. "Maybe Marsh worked on his simple nature. Anyhow, he thought Marsh was the best friend he had. He would have trusted him with his life and soul. Maybe he was right. You can't tell. Marsh might have been the best and squarest man in the world till he got his hands into that million dollars worth of rocks.

"Well, Mooreland sat down and wrote a letter to each of his heirs, telling them what he had done. You see, the murder insurance wouldn't be any

good unless they knew the conditions. I guess the heirs were surprised. They couldn't imagine Mooreland having a million dollars to divide. Maybe some of them thought he was joking. Maybe one or two thought he was a bit cracked."

"Just what I thought," Harrington mumbled. "Anyway, I never took it seriously. What happened?"

"Mooreland thought all his worries were over and that he could sit back and enjoy his old age. He was only partly right. The diamonds were off his mind, but he couldn't rid himself of his old fears. They grew worse as he got older. Finally, he went and hid himself in the old hilltop hotel he owned, with only a servant for company. He thought he would be safe there. His friends, including Marsh, had homes all around. But one day he got an inkling—I don't know how it came to him—that something funny was going on. Marsh was doing queer things. He began to wonder about his murder insurance. And one day he went down the hill to ask Marsh a few straight questions. He never left Marsh's house."

"I know," said Harrington grimly. "Marsh murdered him. I suppose Mooreland asked too many embarrassing questions, and he wanted the million for himself. The murder insurance didn't work very well."

"No, it didn't turn out so good. I guess Marsh figured nobody took it seriously. Anyhow, he made a neat job of it. Mooreland just faded out. Nobody knew what became of him." The blackmailer grinned shrewdly. "Look here, Harrington. Didn't

you come here with the idea of nabbing Mooreland's murderer and getting half a million dollars worth of rocks as your reward?"

Harrington fixed him with a look of aversion.

"No," shortly. "I lack your commercial talents, Tarkin. I only wanted to see the murderer of a lovable old man brought to justice."

"Yeah? Have any luck?"

"Not a great deal."

"Too bad. You might have grabbed the prize. Instead, it seems to me, you stand a good chance of getting the chair."

A cold, hard smile twisted Harrington's lips.

"Who were Mooreland's heirs?" he asked suddenly.

"Marsh was one of them, of course. Then there was yourself, Carstairs, Carmody, Harry Stoddard, and the servant he took with him when he went into hiding in the old hilltop hotel."

"Oh, the servant," said Harrington.

"Yeah, I guess he earned his share, if he ever gets it. He stuck to Mooreland through thick and thin. 'Snooks,' Mooreland called him. Sounds like a dog, eh? Well, that's what Snooks was—a faithful old dog."

Harrington nodded absently. "And where do you come in?"

"Right here," said Tarkin.

He leaped with the lightness of a cat, yet the sudden impact sent Harrington staggering against the wall. A moment's chaos, then the slamming of a door. Harrington felt his pocket.

The coffin was gone!

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE GLASS

In an instant he was racing in pursuit, marvelling at Tarkin's lightness of touch and cursing his own carelessness. A groan escaped him as he rushed out upon the piazza and heard an engine's roar and saw a red tail light twinkling among the trees. It seemed that the thoughtful Tarkin had made his plans with a view to a hurried departure.

Harrington ran down the curving driveway to the garage. As he reached it, he caught a final glimpse of the darting red light which showed the way Tarkin and the million in diamonds had gone. He flung the great sliding doors wide and saw the graceful lines of the car gleaming in the dusk. It would have to prove its mettle to-night.

He sprang for the driver's seat, then came to a dead stop. A small light was moving inside the car, and the rear door was blocked by a man's shoulders and back. A mutter sounded, and the shoulders and back straightened up. Whittaker's dour face and rangy figure appeared in the meagre light. He held a flashlight in his hand.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Harrington," was his casual remark. "You look excited."

"The diamonds—Tarkin—" he said.

Whittaker nodded. "Yes, I expected that. You're going to chase him, I suppose? You will have to

hurry. The car he took can certainly hit it up. And now Carmody will have to stay here till you get back. There won't be another car on the place."

Harrington, one foot on the running board, stared at him. He talked as calmly and ramblingly as if Tarkin had run away with a pocketful of junk instead of a million in diamonds.

"Don't you understand? The diamonds!"

"Yes. Too bad. Well, you had better step on her. You've still got the gun I handed you, I suppose?"

Harrington gave a dazed nod. He touched the starter, and the engine responded with a lusty snort. He heard Whittaker bang the door shut and warn him against reckless driving, and then the car shot out of the garage and tore into the driveway. Harrington switched on the headlights and gazed out along the winding ribbon of road, and a dejected mutter fell from his lips. Tarkin had a good two minutes' start, and a faster car as well. All he could hope for was a stroke of luck.

He flew past Luke Garbo's garage. It was dark and showed no sign of life. Now a three-corner crossing was in front of him, and there was nothing to indicate which way the blackmailer had gone. Possibly, in order to avoid pursuit, Tarkin had defied the traffic regulations and darkened his lights.

Having nothing to guide him, he made a random turn, and now he was speeding along the very same road he had travelled when Marsh had so mysteriously appeared in the car. It was just possible that Tarkin had gone to the old hilltop hotel. It

seemed to be a central point in all sorts of villainous activities, and a likely destination for a man with a million dollars worth of diamonds in his pocket.

He urged the car to its utmost speed. There was a roar of wind in his ears. The landscape, black and shadowy beneath the stars, was a breathless stream of hills and dips and curves. Now and then a morbid urge caused him to glance at the rear-view mirror. It required but a slight stretch of the imagination to see Marsh's face back there in the dusk. The night, the crazily winding road, and his taut nerves made it easy to recreate that astounding scene.

Mile after mile slipped by in a panorama of black jungles and heaving fields. Soon he would reach the point where the narrow hilltop road branched off to the left. And now, as a swift climb brought him to the apex of an elevation, he could see a ribbon of dusky silver gleaming down below. Apparently, it was a stream winding its way through the valley.

Instinctively he eased his pressure on the accelerator. A disturbing sensation, stronger than the zest of the chase, came upon him. It was somewhere in this vicinity that Marsh had so mysteriously appeared in the rear seat. And down below, at the foot of the hill, he saw an arched span across the ribbon of silver. In another moment, there was a rumbling in his ears. He was crossing a bridge. The Crooked Creek bridge?

The ribbon of silver was behind him now, and before him was another stiff climb. He should have taken it with a rush, but instead he let the engine slow down. A stupefying sensation was beat-

ing against his brain. His senses seemed to go numb, as if stunned by an incredible manifestation.

A whiff of cigar smoke was drifting over his shoulder!

He lifted his eyes to the rear-view mirror and held them there rigidly. The car, even at the slow speed it was now travelling, lurched dangerously. He righted it by force of instinct and applied the brakes, stopping on the edge of a ditch. His eyes, rounded and glassy, were still fixed on the mirror. He shook his head and gave an insane laugh. No, such an astounding thing could not happen more than once in a lifetime. He must be dreaming. But there it was—a man's face in the mirror. Someone was occupying the rear seat, and curls of smoke issued lazily from the cigar clamped between his teeth. Harrington laughed again, like a drunken man. Incongruities were thronging his brain. Marsh, too, had sat in that seat smoking a cigar. But this man did not have Marsh's square shoulders and broad face.

"Whittaker!" he exclaimed thickly.

The district attorney nodded as casually as if it were the most natural thing in the world that he should be sitting there. Harrington turned in his seat, feeling that the thing he had seen in the glass must be an optical delusion. But there was nothing illusory about the occupant of the rear seat. He was very real and very matter of fact.

"How—how did you get here?" Harrington stammered, gaping at him fishily.

"Simplest thing in the world," Whittaker assured him.

Harrington stared at him as he sat in the dusky interior of the car. His brain described a few dizzy revolutions.

"But Marsh—Marsh didn't——"

"No, he didn't. But maybe Storm will find the answer to that." Through the car window, he looked out at the meandering banks of the creek. "See anything of Storm's car?"

Harrington looked dazedly about him. The bridge was less than a hundred feet behind. There were woods on all sides, but through the trees could be seen the pearl-grey streak of the creek.

"I don't see any car."

"Well. Storm isn't very far away. And he's shrewd enough not to leave his car where it can be seen. I guess he followed the creek down a little ways. Of course, he may have found what he was looking for and gone back."

"Wouldn't we have met him if he had done that?"

"Oh, you can never tell about Storm. He doesn't do things in the expected way. He may have gone back by another road. But I guess we'll wait a little while."

Harrington nodded dully. He was not giving much thought to Storm and his mysterious search. The major portion of his brain was occupied with Whittaker's sudden appearance in the car. It could be explained in a very simple manner, perhaps, but that explanation threw no light on Marsh's equally sudden appearance in the same car. There was a divergence of circumstances at the very outset. They converged only at the point

where the rear-view mirror had reflected a man in the back seat.

"So you gave up the chase?" Whittaker inquired.

Harrington started. Tarkin and the million in diamonds had gone completely out of his mind.

"Just as well," said Whittaker. "I suspect you took the wrong road, anyway."

Harrington stared at him. He seemed to take the matter very calmly, as if a fortune in diamonds could be picked up any day.

"Which way do you think Tarkin went?"

"I don't know, of course, but I have an idea that he went to Carmody's house."

"Carmody's house?" Harrington's brain turned over several puzzling circumstances. "But he didn't start that way. Besides, there's nobody home."

"That's so. But, if Tarkin was going to Carmody's, you may be sure he didn't go the shortest way, but zigzagged about a bit to throw off pursuit. Anyway, that's what I should have done if I had been in his place."

"But why should Tarkin take the diamonds to Carmody's house?"

"Ah, that's a poser. We'll have to ask Storm what he thinks about that." Whittaker lowered his dour face over his cigar. "You see now how it happened, don't you?"

"How what happened?"

"How Marsh got into the car."

"No, I'll be hanged if I do!"

"Well, maybe Storm will make it clear. I can't be sure till I hear from him." He looked up and glanced along the sides of the car, then turned up

the handles on each rear door and saw that the windows were closed. "Now, here is the setting, just as it was that night. Just imagine that I am Marsh. Now take a walk around the car and see if you can figure out a way to get at me with a knife."

Harrington fixed him with a long, wondering look, then stepped out and closed the door behind him. In a sombre, tingling mood he ran his hands over every square inch of the outer surface. He paid particular attention to the rear window, for it was his impression that the fatal thrust had come from that direction. But there was no loophole anywhere. He could see no possible way in which an assassin, operating from the outside, could attack a man seated inside the car.

With a mutter of bafflement, he started back to his seat, and then something made him suddenly tense and alert. Reaching instinctively for the pistol Whittaker had given him, he glanced sharply along the ditch beside the road, partly concealed by a scrubby growth. He heard no unusual sounds now, only the rustling of dead leaves and a chirping and squawking from the depths of the woods. Yet, with pistol in hand and an uneasy sensation in his mind, he walked along the ditch, kicking a weed and a bush here and there. At length, convinced that he had been mistaken, he returned to the car.

"Well?" muttered Whittaker, and then, as he saw the pistol in Harrington's hand, his eyes widened in astonishment. "Oh, you went about it realistically, as if you were the murderer. But the murderer didn't use a pistol. He used a knife."

"I know," said Harrington, not caring to correct him, "but I imagined the pistol was a knife."

"I see. And did the imaginary knife give you an inspiration?"

"No." Harrington sat down at the wheel and turned back, facing the district attorney. "For the life of me, I can't see how it was done."

"*H'm.*" Whittaker grinned sombrely. "Then we are exactly where we were before. If the murder couldn't have been done from the outside, then it must have been done from the inside, and in that case only you could have done it. That is, unless Storm can give us a different slant on it."

As he spoke, he toyed absently with the lap robe that hung on a rope stretched out along the back of the front seat. Of a sudden, a look of intentness came into his face.

"The seat curves forward," he observed, "but, of course, the robe falls down straight. A man, if he were as small as Tarkin, could almost hide behind the robe."

Harrington started and leaned farther back. A look of keen interest appeared in his face, but it did not last long.

"It couldn't be done," he declared. "I sat like this when it happened, looking straight at Marsh, just as I am looking at you now. The murderer couldn't possibly reach out from behind the robe and stab him without my seeing him. Anyway," he added in a tone of finality, "there was nobody behind the robe. I made sure of that."

"That's out, then." Whittaker sighed lugubriously. "I'm doing my level best to clear you,

but I'm not getting much help. Now, just let's try to figure it out. Marsh was sitting just as I am now. You had turned back in your seat and were looking at Marsh just as you are now looking at me. It was dark outside, and there couldn't have been much light inside the car, only what was thrown back by the headlights. Still, I suppose you could see what was going on. Now try and remember what you saw."

Harrington searched his memory. The scene was very vivid in his mind. The same scene was before his eyes now, except that he had to imagine that the district attorney was Marsh and that a pistol was pointed at him. Could there have been a movement back there in the dusk which his eyes had failed to catch? It was possible. He had seen murder in Marsh's eyes, and a man facing death was not overly observant.

"No," he declared, "I didn't see anything that explains how the murder was done. All I saw was Marsh's face. It changed horribly. And then he let out a scream. And then—then he died."

"*H'm.* A jury would have a hard time swallowing that. Now, just try to jog up the old memory. One thing is sure. With all the doors and windows closed, the murderer couldn't have got inside the car while you sat looking at Marsh. Either he was inside the car before, or else he committed the murder from the outside."

"He couldn't have been in the car," Harrington declared.

"Then it was done from the outside."

"But that's just as impossible."

"If it is, then you're the murderer. But let's look into that. The wound was along the side of the throat, toward the neck. That proves— By the way, do you remember whether Marsh moved his head just before he was stabbed?"

"He might have—a little. I'm not sure."

"Well, anyway, it looks as if the stabbing had been done from behind. Now, except for the window, the back of the car is solid. Nobody could run a knife through it without leaving marks. There aren't any marks—not even a scratch. I've looked. That leaves only the window."

"And that window can't be opened."

"I know. But the murder couldn't have been done any other way, unless you did it yourself. Now, granting it was done through the window, the murderer could have reached in behind Marsh's shoulder and done his work without you seeing him."

Harrington gazed thoughtfully at the window in the back. Yes, barring the fact that the window was immovable, save by a mechanical operation, something of that sort might have happened. The immovability of the window, however, was a stubborn fact. It knocked Whittaker's theory to pieces. It shattered the only explanation that was at all workable. And now——

He sat tense and rigid. Suddenly, his eyes still fixed on the window in the back. Instinctively, his fingers tightened around the pistol which he had held in his hand since he searched the scrubby growth alongside the ditch.

"What's up?" Whittaker inquired, noticing his expression.

"Oh, nothing," said Harrington carelessly. His mind had just been re-enacting the murder on the lonely hilltop, and in all probability he had only imagined that there had been a flicker—a flicker of a hand or a face—against the rear window. Whittaker regarded him with a queer, far-off look.

"By the way," he said suddenly, "Marsh was pointing a pistol at you. How did he hold it? Like a man who knows how to handle firearms?"

Harrington opened his eyes wide at the strange question.

"Come to think of it, it struck me that he handled it a bit amateurishly. But even an amateur can shoot straight at close quarters."

Whittaker nodded. He seemed strangely excited.

"Let's see that pistol." He took the weapon from Harrington's hand. "Now, don't get nervous. I'm not going to hurt you. Is this the way Marsh held it?"

Harrington felt an odd thrill as the weapon was pointed at the region just above his diaphragm.

"No, he held it higher."

"Like this?" The district attorney raised the hand in which he held the pistol.

"Higher still. As I recall it, his hand was almost level with his chin. Yes, that's about right."

"Good grief!" Whittaker exclaimed, and Harrington marvelled at the look that came into his face. It was as if he had received a revelation too staggering for his mind to absorb. "And what became of the pistol afterward?"

"It fell at Marsh's feet when he died. I picked it up and carried it about with me until the time

when I was knocked unconscious in the old hill-top hotel. It was gone when I awoke."

Whittaker stared at him in open-mouthed amazement, and Harrington wondered what astounding thought had entered his mind. And then, raising his head a little, his eyes fell once more on the rear window. He gave a violent start.

"Look out!" he cried sharply. "There's someone——"

He jerked the pistol from Whittaker's hand, aimed quickly, and fired. A thunderous crack, followed by the crash of broken glass, disturbed the peaceful landscape. The night was full of rumbling echoes. A gentle puff of wind swept through the broken window in the rear, scattering a film of acrid smoke. Through the lifting vapours, Whittaker stared incredulously at his companion.

"Crazy?" he demanded.

Harrington, pistol in hand, leaped from his seat.

"Hurry," he cried, "or he'll get away!"

He scrambled through the snarled underbrush alongside the road. Whittaker followed with the dazed air of one startled out of his senses.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

AFTER a wild scampering back and forth through the snarled vegetation, Harrington stopped and mopped the perspiration from his face. Puffing and grumbling, Whittaker ran up to him.

"Throw those fits very often?" he demanded, a little peevishly. "What's it all about?"

Harrington looked about him while he regained his breath. The moon was just rising, white and round, casting silver paths among the trees. After the violent interruption, the woods were resuming their murmurs.

"Do you know," Whittaker added, "that the bullet you fired missed me by a fraction of an inch?"

"That's as good as a mile. Wonder by how much I missed the other one."

"What other one?"

"Wish I knew! I just had the briefest glimpse of somebody's face at the window and saw a pistol aimed at the back of your skull, and then I fired."

"*H'm.*" The district attorney peered at him thoughtfully in the moonlight. "Sure you saw that, or are you just imagining?"

"I saw it. And as I jumped out of the car, I saw somebody running into the woods. Couldn't you hear the brush crackling?"

"Believe I did, come to think of it. I wasn't listening, really. My head felt as if a million shots were roaring inside it. Did you get a good look at the fellow?"

"No. I haven't the faintest idea what he looked like. It was only a second's glimpse."

"Well—" Whittaker grinned dourly—"I bet I could describe him. Guess I won't though. May be wrong. Anyhow, this proves I'm on the right track. Somebody doesn't like the way Storm and I carried on to-day, and so he thought he would stop us."

"Then you think the man I saw at the car window was the man who murdered Marsh?"

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"But he didn't go about it the way he went about the murder of Marsh."

"Oh, no. A man isn't likely to pull that trick more than once in a lifetime."

Incongruities swam in Harrington's mind. He recalled the strange things the district attorney had said just before the face appeared at the car window. It had been his impression that the solution to one of the knottiest problems connected with the Marsh murder had come to Whittaker in a flash.

"Whittaker," he asked, "you know how Marsh was killed?"

"No, I don't. It's just a guess, and it needs verification. Storm will have to help me out on that. Storm is— By Jove! If the murderer tried to kill me, he would certainly try to kill Storm, too. Wonder if anything has happened to him."

The moonlight showed a look of alarm on his dour face. Harrington smiled.

"Oh, you needn't worry. It isn't likely the murderer is sharing your exalted opinion of Storm. The logical man to kill, if he wanted to put a stop to the real brain work in his investigation, was yourself."

The district attorney looked very doubtful.

"I don't like it," he confessed. "The murderer didn't follow us out here. He must have been here ahead of us. And what would he be doing out here except to lay for Storm?"

"He might have come out to see how Storm was getting on. Maybe he got wind of the assignment you gave him. Most likely, Storm has gone back to Peekacre."

"Well, I hope so. And we'd better be getting back ourselves. I want to get there before Carmody leaves." He chuckled moodily. "Much obliged to you for saving my life. And now you might as well give me that gun back. You are not guarding diamonds now."

Harrington handed him the weapon and smiled wryly in contemplation of how Samuel Tarkin had turned the tables on him. They started walking back. Their successful chase had taken them about two hundred yards from the point where they had left the car.

Of a sudden Harrington stopped. The rising full moon was casting a silvery light over the woods, revealing objects that had not been visible before. Now Harrington's eyes were fixed on a small tumble-down shack, perhaps a hunter's cabin, some fifty feet farther back into the woods. On an impulse he started toward it.

"What now?" the district attorney grumbled.

"Come along," Harrington flung back over his shoulder.

He moved cautiously through the underbrush, trying to make as little noise as possible. He had no definite idea that the murderous prowler had taken refuge in the cabin, but there was a chance that he had done so. Considering how quickly he had taken up the pursuit, the man could not have got far away.

Now he stopped behind a tree. There was a little clearing in front of him, and the cabin stood in the centre of it. He waited until Whittaker came up.

"We'd better crawl," he whispered. "We would make fine targets in the moonlight."

Whittaker nodded, and they proceeded on hands and knees. Suddenly Harrington paused and signalled his companion to do likewise. A creaking sound, like that produced by a foot placed on a rotting board, had suddenly issued from the shack. Harrington's heart gave a little lurch. His instinct had led him aright. There was someone inside the cabin.

"Careful!" Whittaker admonished.

After a brief wait, Harrington crawled forward again, keeping in the shadow of a tall poplar standing just outside the shack. Whittaker was just behind him, with his pistol ready for instant action. On close view, the cabin appeared very small and in an extremely dilapidated condition. The door was open, and beyond it was the black, yawning interior.

Harrington's veins tingled. Anything might lurk in that black space. A few more crawling motions, and he was at the door, one elbow resting on one

of the crumbling wooden steps. Whittaker was at his side now, his pistol striking a hard metallic sheen through the moonlight, his hampered breathing testifying to his excitement.

After a brief wait, Harrington lifted his head. Perhaps it was a mad thing to do, for in this position he offered a splendid target for anyone lying in wait within. He scanned the dark space, but the darkness was impenetrable.

Of a sudden he sprang to his feet. A peculiar sound had come from the interior. He had been straining his ears for sounds, but not a sound of this kind. He had expected to hear a trigger being cocked or to see the flash of a blade of steel, but this was different. It was the beginning of a scream that was instantly stifled into a groan.

He waited, spellbound, with cold shivers chasing up and down his spine. For a few moments all was still within, and then came a rattling sound that made his imagination picture a body writhing in agony. It was followed by a heavy thud that grated horribly on his taut nerves.

He rushed inside, and in the darkness, he stumbled against something that sent a sickening shiver through his body. And then the darkness was brushed aside by a flashlight in Whittaker's hand. Evidently his hand was shaking, for the white beam trembled. Harrington stared down at the floor. A man was lying there, with arms and legs in a grotesquely twisted position, and there was a red trickle from his chest. There was a writhing movement of the arms and body, but it ceased in a few moments.

A dull, horrified exclamation broke from Whittaker's lips. Harrington looked down at the dead man's face. It was dark, and once it had been finely moulded, but now the features were hideously distorted.

"Harry Stoddard!" he cried thickly.

Horror and astonishment clashed in his mind. He had expected to find anything but this. A shot fired out of the darkness would not have surprised him, but to come upon a dead body in the tumble-down old shack was a thing that went beyond the imagination. Strangest of all, the wound must have been inflicted while the two were waiting outside the cabin. It was then they had heard that curious, broken scream.

He looked about the little cabin. There was no sign of Stoddard's assailant. Yet, since but a minute had passed since the scream rang out, he could not be far away. If he had taken refuge in the woods outside, the dry underbrush would have betrayed his movements.

On the floor, almost within reach of the dead man's hand, lay a pistol. Whittaker picked it up and examined it with a curious expression. He chuckled grimly as he tested the hammer and opened the cartridge chamber. Meanwhile, Harrington glanced again about the little cabin, consisting of but a single room. It seemed as if the murderer must be skulking somewhere in the shadows along the walls.

"Hadn't we better look around?" he suggested in a whisper.

"What would we look for? Oh, the killer. No,

I don't think it would do any good. He's too far away."

"But he must have been here a minute or two ago."

"Think so? Well, you might have a look. I'll stay here."

Harrington cast him a long, puzzled glance, then proceeded cautiously along the cabin walls. Finding nothing, he went outside and walked around the hut, then searched the surrounding ground. Dry twigs and dead weeds crackled under his foot at every step, telling him again that the murderer could not have escaped without being heard. He went back inside. Whittaker was still absorbed in contemplation of the pistol.

"Ever see this before?" he asked.

Harrington took the weapon and inspected it.

"It might be the one Marsh had," he declared.

"The one you picked up from the floor of the car and afterward lost in the hilltop hotel?"

"It looks like it. But I suppose there are thousands of the same kind." He handed the pistol back. "Do you think Stoddard committed suicide?" he asked suddenly.

"Why should I think that?"

"The pistol was lying so close to his hand that it looked as if he had dropped it when he fell."

Whittaker put the weapon in his pocket and appeared to consider the idea.

"No," he said thoughtfully, "I don't think Stoddard committed suicide. I must see what Storm thinks about it."

"But isn't it curious that Stoddard was killed just as we were crawling up to the cabin?"

"Yes," said Whittaker with a dour grin, "and it's curious that Marsh was killed just as he was about to pot you."

Harrington gave him a long, puzzled glance, and again he wondered what was going on in the district attorney's mind.

"You flattered me," said Whittaker. "Modest though I am, you almost convinced me that the murderer wanted to kill me because he was afraid of me. I don't think so now."

Harrington recalled his brief glimpse of a face outside the car window.

"He was certainly aiming a pistol at you."

"No doubt, somebody was aiming a pistol at me. But as for the rest— Well, we'll see. There's nothing we can do here. I'll telephone Doc Griffin from Peekacre and have him come and take care of the body. Guess we'd better hurry back. Have a hunch we're in for a bit of excitement to-night."

Harrington was a greatly puzzled man as they walked back to the car.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DARK HOUSE

At the district attorney's suggestion, they stopped on a hill overlooking the valley in which, separated only by a narrow stretch of woods, the Marsh and Carmody residences were located.

"I want to think," said Whittaker. "It's a nuisance not to have Storm here to do my thinking for me. Now let's see. There," indicating a cluster of lights, "is the Marsh house. Looks as if something was going on. And there," pointing to a single light twinkling through the trees, "is the Carmody place. Looks pretty quiet, doesn't it? You can never tell, though. The quietest-looking place is sometimes the liveliest."

"You are speaking of deeds of darkness?" Harrington surmised in a whimsical vein.

"Something like that. Now let me think. There's no car on the Marsh place. As far as we know, Carmody and Miss Lanyard, as she calls herself, are still there. Of course, Carmody may have bucked up and walked home. He's been an anxious man all day—ever since Carstairs dropped in and handed us the coffin."

Harrington cast him a quick glance.

"It's possible he doesn't know," Whittaker went on, "that Samuel Tarkin got the coffin away from you. Anyway, he is a worried man. And I guess

Miss Lanyard is a worried girl. I'd be worried, too, if there was a million dollars worth of diamonds at stake. And so they've been anxious all day to get back to the Carmody place. Maybe Tarkin is there waiting for them. Again, maybe he isn't."

His eyes ranged the valley between the two houses, one almost dark, the other brightly lighted.

"Wish I knew what to do," he said plaintively. "Guess I'm too dependent on Storm. I had a clear idea when I started out, but a lot of things have happened since then."

"What was your idea?" Harrington asked pointedly. "You gave me an awful jolt when I saw you in the glass all of a sudden."

"It was just an experiment. I wanted to see if it could be done."

"But, you see, the conditions weren't the same as when Marsh played the same trick."

"No, not quite. Anyway, I thought a ride would do me good. Besides, I was getting worried about Storm. I'm still worried about him. Tell you what you do. Drive up as far as Luke Garbo's garage, and then I'll get out and walk up to the Marsh house and see what's stirring. I want to telephone Doc Griffin, anyway."

In an acutely puzzled state of mind, Harrington did as directed. There was a light in the garage, but Luke Garbo was nowhere in sight. The district attorney got out and walked away with a rapid, lunging stride.

Harrington lighted a cigarette and waited. Being too nervous to remain still, he walked over to the garage and looked in. There was no sign of the proprietor anywhere. Possibly, he had been called

to the scene of an accident. Harrington strolled back and forth a few times, and presently Whittaker's rangy figure appeared around a bend in the road. He climbed inside the car and asked Harrington to drive toward the Carmody place.

"Storm got back," he reported as the car was being swung around. "He was waiting for me at the Marsh house. It took him a long time to find what he was looking for."

"Oh, he found it?"

"Of course he found it. Storm always gets what he goes after. Clever fellow, Storm!"

Harrington fixed him with a quizzical eye as he drove along, but Whittaker did not seem inclined to go into confidences.

"Carmody and Miss Lanyard are still there," he went on. "It seems Carmody has been fretting terribly. Wouldn't be surprised if he asked somebody to take him home in the car Storm used to go to Crooked Creek bridge."

Harrington bent a scowling gaze on the moon-bathed road ahead. It seemed the district attorney was altogether too secretive. Yet, he realized, Whittaker had no desire to be tantalizing. Possibly he was not quite sure of his facts as yet.

"What's Carmody fretting about?" he asked.

"The coffin, of course. He had the shock of his life when Carstairs walked in and calmly pulled the coffin from his pocket. Carmody doesn't see how there can be two coffins exactly alike in both shape and size."

"Two coffins? Then—" Harrington stopped short, seized with a staggering thought.

"Yes," said Whittaker, "that same coffin which Carstairs brought to Peekacre this morning should have been reposing in a snug hiding place in Carmody's home. Carmody couldn't believe his senses when Carstairs pulled it out of his pocket. The shock was too much for him. He collapsed under it. And all day he has been anxious to go home and see if there can possibly be a mistake somewhere."

Harrington sat silent, guiding the wheel in an absent manner, his mind too full for words.

"But how did the coffin, with the diamonds in it, get into Carmody's possession?" he finally blurted out.

"That's what I'd like to know. Better stop here. Just as well not to advertise our arrival. It might be a good idea to park the car behind that clump of trees."

Mechanically, Harrington drove the car off the road and manœuvred it in into the desired position. He turned off the lights and they stepped out. Avoiding the driveway, they walked in silence through a sprinkling of pines and hemlocks, all the time guided by the single light shining in the house.

"We'll work around to the back," said Whittaker in an undertone, and they made a wide detour. Evidently the district attorney had been over the ground before, for he seemed thoroughly familiar with it. As they walked side by side, Harrington detected signs of a tension and a suppressed excitement about him.

A wall of stucco and stone loomed before them. There was not a single light on this side of the house.

The moonlight tinged the black windows with a blurred irridescence. They stopped before a door, narrow and disproportionately tall, with a fanlight above it.

"I feel like an arsenal," Whittaker muttered. "Two guns—my own and the one we found beside Stoddard's body. Hope this door isn't locked."

Luckily, it was not. The district attorney entered first, and Harrington followed. In the dark, without speaking a word, they made their way through several rooms. At length, after Whittaker had opened a crack, they stopped and listened. No sounds came. The district attorney moved forward and played his flashlight over the floor. They were in the library.

"Nice and cosy," Whittaker observed, but his voice was not quite steady. He swung his torch over the walls, then focused it on a circular safe embedded in the oak panelling. "I could never see what people want with these flimsy wall safes. You could almost pry them open with a can opener. I certainly wouldn't want to keep a million dollars worth of diamonds in one of them."

Harrington bent a questioning gaze on his long, sombre face. Whittaker moved away from the wall, put his torch on the desk and, displaying his white vest to advantage, looked about him.

"Devilish things, diamonds," he soliloquized. "They seem to turn people's minds. There have already been three murders on account of the ones in the coffin—Mooreland, Marsh, and Stoddard. Maybe there'll be another before the night is over. I wouldn't be surprised——"

The buzzing of the telephone interrupted him. He looked at it dubiously, then walked up to the instrument and put the receiver to his ear.

"Hello," he said in fair imitation of Martin Carmody's timid voice. "Yes, this is Mr. Carmody. Oh, yes, Tarkin. Well?"

There was a brief conversation. The district attorney looked slyly pleased when he hung up the receiver.

"Tarkin wants Carmody or Miss Lanyard to meet him at the hilltop hotel," he announced.

Harrington started, then stared at him for a moment.

"And Tarkin has the diamonds with him, of course."

"I suppose so. Evidently, he wants to turn them over to Carmody or Miss Lanyard."

"For a good, stiff consideration?"

"Maybe." Whittaker scratched his head. "Wonder why Tarkin didn't bring the diamonds here. He knew Carmody would be back here after a while. Maybe he didn't think this house was a safe place for that sort of transaction."

Harrington nodded absently. His mind was too full of problems and vague premonitions to give much thought to the reasons for Tarkin's conduct.

"Did you ever hear of Mooreland's murder insurance?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, just the other day. Queer arrangement, wasn't it?"

"You've had a suspicion, haven't you, that it was Carmody who murdered him?"

Whittaker looked doubtful and a little shamefaced.

"Yes, I've had a suspicion, but not a very definite one. After what has happened lately, I'm more uncertain than ever. Storm thinks that——"

He did not reveal what Storm was thinking. Instead, he reached hurriedly for the flashlight and extinguished it. From the outside came the humming of an engine, and a white glare was thrown on the window shades.

"I suppose that's Carmody," he muttered. "And maybe Miss Lanyard is with him. Wish I would crawl into a mouse hole and watch them for a while."

"Maybe this will do." Harrington spoke tensely, with a sense that the next few moments would bring dynamic developments. He led the district attorney across the library and opened a door. They stepped into the smaller room from which Theresa had been abducted the other night. They stood there silently side by side, with the door open a narrow crack in front of them.

A tense wait followed. Harrington started nervously at the opening of a door on the other side of the library. Voices and footsteps sounded, and then a light flashed through the narrow opening. Evidently the new-comers had turned on the reading lamp in the library.

"Now we shall see!" a voice remarked. It was hoarse and a trifle shrill and edged with nervous excitement. Harrington recognized it at once as Carmody's.

"Couldn't you wait, dad?" asked Theresa nervously. "You aren't well, and the doctor said you must avoid shocks."

Harrington looking out over the dictrict attorney's shoulder, listened intently. In spite of what he knew

about the relationship, it seemed odd to hear Theresa address Carmody as "dad".

"No shock could be worse than this strain," Carmody declared. "Let's get it over."

"In just a moment, dad. Sit here and rest a bit. The ride gave you quite a shaking up, you know. You mustn't exert yourself. We have all night."

With a good-natured grumble, he yielded to her persuasion. There were sounds which indicated that they had seated themselves in a part of the library not visible through the narrow opening. The safe in the wall panelling could be clearly seen, however.

"I don't know what's come over you, dad," Theresa was saying. "Why should you get so dreadfully upset over a few diamonds?"

"A few diamonds. They are worth a million."

"But what's a million. It isn't worth ruining your health for."

"The diamonds belong to me," Carmody declared. "Nobody else has any right to them. I don't intend to let a gang of despicable criminals take them away from me."

"Oh, dad! I wish you wouldn't talk like that. The diamonds can't do you any good. I'd rather see them dumped in the ocean than have you brood over them. Besides, it isn't your nature to be greedy. You were always generous to a fault. I don't understand you."

"Greedy?" Carmody chuckled grimly, with a nervous catch in his voice. "No, I'm not greedy. It isn't that. It is— Don't you understand, dear?"

"No. All I understand is that those horrid diamonds are ruining your life."

"Oh, no. It isn't as bad as that. On the contrary, they enable me to look forward to a carefree and comfortable old age." He paused, and when he spoke again his tone was strangely gentle. "As you know, I loved your mother. And when she died —you were only *so* high then—I promised to take care of you. I've done my best. I've loved you as if you were my own daughter. There's one thing, though, that's hung like a shadow over my life. It's the fact that, when I die, there'll be no one to look after you. I shan't be able to leave you much. There will only be a few——"

"Oh, dad, what do I care? I'm strong and healthy and can take care of myself."

"Yes, doubtless. But I'm worried just the same. I should be so much happier if I could leave you something substantial. Now, don't scold me, dear. I may be a foolish old man, but that's the way I feel. Anyway, I was just stubborn enough to refuse to be cheated out of what's mine. Now, don't try to stop me. I can't stand this uncertainty any longer. I must see about those diamonds."

"But it's ridiculous, dad! The diamonds are in the safe."

"Safes can be robbed."

"But your safe is different from most. No burglar is likely to find the inner compartment. You said so yourself."

"I know, but where did Carstairs get that box? Where did it come from if it didn't come from my safe. Now, dear. I'm going over there and find out."

A sigh sounded, then a series of quick, nervous footsteps. Through the narrow opening the two

watchers saw the tall, slightly stooping figure of Carmody. His face looked a little drawn and haggard, and his hands shook as he manipulated the combination lock. Directly behind him stood Theresa, watching anxiously.

The safe door came open, and then followed further manipulation. Evidently Carmody was now opening the inner compartment of which Theresa had spoken. His face showed a terrible strain. His whole body was shaking.

Harrington gave a sudden start. He looked out into the library as far as the narrow opening permitted. Whittaker, too, stood tense and rigid. Footsteps, very light and furtive, sounded across the library floor. Someone, who as yet could not be seen through the narrow crack, seemed to be creeping up on the two persons in front of the safe.

"It's here!" cried Carmody hoarsely.

Weak from excitement, he staggered away from the safe. His face was pale, but his eyes shone unnaturally. In his hand he held a coffin-shaped box, gorgeously decorated.

"See, dear?" he cried thickly. "It's here. It's——"

"Much obliged," said a voice. "Just what I've been lookin' for."

Harrington started sharply, then stood stonily still.

It was Luke Garbo's voice!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MURDERER

AFTER a few moments' stupor, Harrington wanted to rush forward, but the district attorney held him back.

"Wait," he whispered. "If Garbo gets rough, I'll use this."

He exhibited his automatic. Harrington nodded, seeing that he was ready to use the weapon at a split second's warning. His staring eyes went out through the narrow opening and fixed on Garbo. The man might have come straight from his poverty-stricken garage, for he was in his working clothes and there were grease smears across his face.

Theresa and Carmody stood in a stunned, speechless immobility, the latter gaping incredulously at Garbo while he hugged the coffin to him with a trembling hand.

"Surprised?" Garbo jeered. "Well, life's full of surprises. Bet Carstairs would be surprised, too, if he could see this. There's an honest chap. Too honest for this world, to my way of thinkin'. What does Carstairs do? Why, he finds a pretty little coffin in the attic of the old hilltop hotel, and so he comes trottin' over to Marsh's house with it and hands it to Whittaker, not knowin' the coffin is loaded with ten-penny nails. That certainly hands me a laugh."

Garbo, suiting the action to the word, laughed heartily.

"Well, I got more'n a laugh out of it. I'm wise to what Carstairs does—see? Don't ask me what put me wise, and I won't tell you no lies. But I does some hard thinkin'. I says to myself that Mr. Carmody musta got a jolt when he saw Carstairs walkin' in with that coffin. And I asks myself what Mr. Carmody would do about it. Why, I says to myself, he'd rush home as soon as he got over his jolt and look in the place where he's been hidin' that pretty little coffin. I struck it about right, didn't I? Yes, just about right. And this sure beats the garage business. Thanks, Mr. Carmody."

He held out his grease-smeared hand for the coffin, but Carmody shrank back.

"Now, what's the use kickin' up a fuss?" Garbo pleaded. "You be nice and accommodatin', and I won't pull any rough stuff. Come on now. Hand over that coffin."

"I'll be hanged if I will!" Carmody rasped out. His voice shook and he was deathly pale, but his manner was determined. Theresa came up to plead with him, but he brushed her firmly aside. "Stand back, dear. This contemptible crook isn't going to bully me. There!"

With a movement so swift that it aroused the admiration and astonishment of the two watchers behind the door, he stepped back to the wall, threw the coffin inside the safe, and then two doors slammed shut in quick succession.

"There's your answer," he declared. "Now get out."

Garbo fixed him with a black look, then his face broke into an ugly leer. Very leisurely, he drew a revolver from his pocket.

"Life's a mighty uncertain proposition," he drawled. "We're here to-day and gone to-morrow. If you want to be here to-morrow, you'd better open that safe—quick!"

He came forward, holding the revolver in his grimy hand. Theresa caught her breath and sprang to the older man's side. Carmody drew himself up to his full height and confronted the garage keeper defiantly. There was something heroic and admirable about him, Harrington thought. He wondered why Whittaker did not interfere. Surely this was the time for action.

"I'll give you one minute to open that safe," Garbo growled.

"And I'll give you half a second to clear out," Carmody retorted with fine disdain. "Save your childish threats for more gullible ears. I know you are not going to shoot me. If I die, who is going to open the safe for you?"

Garbo was taken aback for a moment, but he rallied quickly.

"Ah, don't try to work your grand manners on me. I'm wise—see? I know now that there's a double wall in that crib of yours. A shot of juice will smash both of 'em. Come on, now. No foolin'!"

He raised the pistol menacingly, and a little cry broke from Theresa's lips.

Then Whittaker pushed the door open and walked out into the library. Garbo glanced aside; the revolver faltered in his hand.

"Drop it, Garbo!" He covered the garage keeper with his pistol. "Drop it, I say!"

A look of consternation came into the grimy face. His hand wavered. Carmody and Theresa stared in open-mouthed astonishment at the two intruders.

"All right," said Garbo surlily, dropping his pistol to the floor. "You've got me. Guess I should have stuck to the garage business."

Whittaker kicked the weapon to a far corner of the room. Harrington watched the garage keeper narrowly. He could see his cunning brain at work, looking for a chance to turn the tables.

"You should," said Whittaker. "It's safe, even if you don't get rich in it. Better sit down, Mr. Carmody. You look tired. And you, Miss Lanyard, surely——"

Harrington shouted a warning, but he was a second too late. With a surprisingly swift and agile movement, Garbo had darted forward and wrested the pistol from the unsuspecting district attorney's hand. In a moment, the wicked eye of the weapon was fixed on Whittaker's chest.

"No," said Garbo triumphantly, "guess I won't go back to the garage, after all. Too much like work. Reach for the ceiling, Whittaker. You, too, Harrington. Up with 'em, or by heck, I'll——"

Whittaker's gently mocking laugh interrupted him.

"Fire away," he said casually, putting his hands in his trousers pockets and exhibiting his immaculate vest.

Garbo stared at him, apparently undecided how to construe such a challenge. Harrington, too,

thought that the district attorney's conduct was rather foolish, bordering on the mock heroic. And then a feeling of utter perplexity came over him. He was watching Garbo, and just now Garbo was staring down at the pistol he was holding. His grimy face twitched. A look of dread showed in his eyes.

"Well, why don't you shoot?" Whittaker taunted. "Not afraid, are you, Garbo?"

Harrington watched tensely, filled with a sense of incongruity. Why was Garbo staring at the pistol in his hand with such a terrorized expression? Why was Whittaker tempting fate in such a disdainful way? He stepped a little closer to the garage keeper, looked at the pistol in his trembling hand, and a mutter of surprise escaped him.

It was not Whittaker's weapon, but the one they had found beside Harry Stoddard's body in the lonely hut in the woods.

Of a sudden, with a beastlike snarl, Garbo flung the weapon from him. With a chuckle, Whittaker picked it up and stuck it in his pocket.

"You needn't have been afraid of it, Garbo," he said. "It didn't happen to be loaded. Stoddard got the last shot from it."

Harrington stared at him in acute bewilderment. Whether the pistol was loaded or unloaded, it did not explain the look of terror with which Garbo had regarded it.

"Watch him, Harrington," the district attorney said. Then he stepped to the window, opened it, took a small metal instrument from his pocket, and let out two shrill whistles.

"A signal," he explained. "Storm and——"

With a hoarse snarl, Garbo sprang for the door, and in a moment Harrington was in pursuit. It took the garage keeper an instant to open the door, and, in that instant Harrington flung himself on his back. And then he received a great surprise. Garbo shook him off as easily as if he had been a child. He grabbed the man's arm, but his own arm was seized in turn, and now an excruciating agony tore through his body. He hung on, although every nerve was screaming in torture.

And then, while his body writhed with pain, something flashed across his mind—a revelation that, despite the torture he was suffering, made him cling all the harder to the man's arm. Only one person had the diabolical power to inflict such awful pain. He stared into the grimy face—hideously distorted by rage and frustration just now—and he was dimly conscious that Whittaker was running up and that Storm's flinty features had just appeared at the door. A name trembled on his lips:

"Carstairs!"

CHAPTER XXV

ALIAS LUKE GARBO

TAKEN to the county gaol, and seeing that everything was lost, Roscoe Carstairs, alias Luke Garbo, turned defeat into an opportunity for self-glorification and made a bombastic confession to District Attorney Whittaker.

Later in the day, in the library of the Marsh house, Whittaker retold the story to a little group consisting of Theresa, Carmody, Harrington, Storm and Samuel Tarkin. The reason for Tarkin's presence was not apparent, except that the shifty-eyed and pasty-faced little blackmailer seemed to be in the habit of turning up anywhere and everywhere.

"He fooled us all—even Storm," said the district attorney, parting his coat and displaying his vest in all its immaculateness. "It's queer how our minds work at times. If a certain circumstance leads us to suspect a man, and if later on that circumstance is explained away, then we jump to the conclusion that the man is innocent. That's the way it was with Carstairs, alias Garbo. Storm and I wondered about those tracks outside the garage. Then the tracks were explained in a perfectly simple manner, and for a while we eliminated Garbo as a suspect. For one thing, we never imagined that he and Carstairs were the same person."

"What was his object in masquerading as a garage keeper?" Harrington wanted to know.

"It goes back to old Mr. Mooreland's murder insurance. I think you all know about it. Carstairs knew that Marsh had murdered Mooreland and was in possession of a million dollars worth of diamonds kept in a miniature Egyptian coffin. He conspired with Stoddard, his confederate, to get hold of those diamonds. They were almost certain that Marsh had hidden them somewhere in the house. They reasoned correctly that no attempt would be made to dispose of them so soon after Mooreland's death. Well, they tried in every way to learn where the diamonds were hidden. Carstairs, pretending to be Marsh's friend, was a frequent visitor at Peekacre, and he would look for the diamonds whenever his host turned his back on him. After a while, Marsh saw through him and threatened to shoot him if he ever came there again.

"But Carstairs was resourceful. He hit upon an idea that would enable him to be near Marsh and give him occasional access to the house. It was just such a daring and spectacular idea as would appeal to Carstairs's nature. It so happened that he knew a little about automobile mechanics. He bought an old garage that had stood idle for months. He also bought a jacket, a pair of overalls, and a few minor articles. Then, under the name of Luke Garbo, he opened the place for business.

"If he didn't spend much time at his garage, nobody wondered about it, for business was dull. Jobs were few and far between, but, in spite of that, Garbo always had a lot of grease and oil smeared

over his face and clothing. It didn't occur to anybody to wonder how he would look with his face washed."

"But what about the night of the murder?" Harrington put in. "We routed him out of bed, you remember. There was no grease on his face then."

"No, but there was a stubble of beard, and we saw him in a dim light. Besides, none of us had seen Carstairs then. Even if we had, we might not have recognized him in Luke Garbo. You see, Carstairs's outstanding feature is a whitish face. He's been cultivating it the past year, I understand. It's a complexion that comes on and off. And Luke Garbo did a good piece of acting that night.

"It was an advantage for Carstairs, as Luke Garbo, to have a place of business within half a mile of the Marsh house. Nobody thought anything of it if occasionally he wandered over to Marsh's garage, and had a look at the car. Then, besides, he let it be known that he could do an odd job of plumbing in a pinch. That was a convenience, there being no professional plumber within miles of Peekacre.

"Marsh employed him two or three times to do minor repairs. I can't say how competently the jobs were done, but I know that once Garbo went away from Peekacre congratulating himself on having a coffin about his grease-smeared clothers that contained a million dollars worth of diamonds. He got a bad jolt when he opened it, however. It contained nothing but nails. It was a replica of the original box, and Marsh had used it as a decoy. I doubt if he ever noticed its disappearance for the very next day he was killed."

The listeners straightened up and watched him intently.

"In the meantime," Whittaker proceeded, "Marsh had begun to entertain certain suspicions of his private secretary, who had entered his employ under the name of Leonard Harrington. He was also doubtful of his wife's nurse, whom he knew as Theresa Lanyard. Little by little he was led to the belief—and he was absolutely right—that these two were secretly trying to connect him with the murder of Mooreland. And one night—the night before his death, by the way—he overheard the nurse and the secretary talking in the cellar. What he heard proved to him that Mr. Harrington was in possession of dangerous information and that he was likely to discover still more damaging evidence. He resolved to kill Harrington.

"I suppose nearly every murderer has aspired to achieve the perfect crime. Marsh planned to kill Mr. Harrington in a way that would be absolutely detection proof. In accord with this plan, he sent Mr. Harrington away on a fake errand, instructing him to deliver a letter to me in which Marsh professed to be in fear for his life and designated Mr. Harrison as one of the persons he was afraid of. Perhaps Marsh's grim sense of humour got in its work there. I think he had a practical purpose, too. A letter of such nature would exclude all suspicion of the real purpose from Harrington's mind.

"Mr. Harrington drove off, stopping at Luke Garbo's garage as Marsh had instructed him to do. While the battery was being charged, his mind was occupied with the strange letter he had in his pocket.

Anybody would be a bit absent-minded under such circumstances. He sat at the wheel while the job was done, looking at the grey sky and thinking about his strange errand. He heard the garage man say something about a storm. Then he heard him close the rear doors. Naturally, with his mind and eyes wandering, he thought they were being closed from the *outside*. He was wrong. They were being closed from the *inside*."

"What?" Harrington asked. "Oh, I see. You did the same thing yesterday. So Luke Garbo concealed himself in the car."

"Yes, and it was a simple thing to slip in through the rear door, slam both doors shut, and hide in the space between the seats. But you are wrong about one thing. It wasn't Luke Garbo. It was Marsh."

The listeners were astonished.

"That explains!" Harrington exclaimed.

"Marsh had gone to the garage that morning," Whittaker went on. "He had no suspicions of Garbo, and he had not yet missed the imitation coffin. He asked Garbo to run into New York and inspect a certain secondhand car he was contemplating buying. You see, he wanted to get rid of Garbo for a few hours. In fact, he expected Garbo would be gone most of the day.

"Soon after luncheon, Marsh went to the garage, donned Garbo's cap and slipped Garbo's jacket and overalls over his clothes, and smeared his face with grease. He had seen and heard enough of Garbo to be able to imitate his manners and speech. He got into the car as I've explained, and then he sat on the

floor behind the front seat while he removed the grease from his face and took off the overalls and jacket. When you crossed the Crooked Creek bridge, he threw them out the window, knowing the stream would carry them away. It carried them quite a distance, but Storm found them yesterday."

"I don't see how you hit upon the solution," Harrington remarked.

"Well, you remember I found some grease spots in the car the other day. They confirmed a hunch of mine. After all, Marsh's appearance in the car couldn't be explained in any other way. Now, Marsh was a coward, and like all cowards he had a mean streak in his nature. That's why he went about the intended murder in that particular way. Appearing suddenly in the car with a pistol in his hand, he had you completely at his mercy. You had no possible chance to fight him.

"Moreover, having the drop on you, he could compel you to drive to an isolated spot where he could commit his crime in safety and where it would be easy to dispose of your body. But it was the mean streak in him that made him remove his overalls and clean his face before he showed himself to you. He wanted you to know who he was. He wanted you to know that the man who was going to kill you was the man you had tried to send up for murder. And so he tormented you for a bit before he pulled the trigger——"

"But he didn't pull the trigger," Harrington interrupted. "He might have done so in the next second, but he was murdered just then."

"You are wrong," said Whittaker gently. "He

did pull the trigger, meaning to kill you—and in so doing he shot himself."

A dead silence prevailed for a time.

"Shot himself?" Harrington echoed.

"Who else could have shot him?" A slow smile spread over Whittaker's dour face.

"But he wasn't shot. He was stabbed."

"Well, he was murdered, at any rate. Whether he was shot or stabbed makes no difference. The murderer was about three hundred yards away when his victim died. I mean Roscoe Carstairs, alias Luke Garbo. You see, Garbo had smelled a rat when Marsh came to him that morning and asked him to go to New York. He left his garage, but he did not go far. He only went to the old hilltop hotel to have a conference with his confederate, Harry Stoddard, who had made the place his headquarters for some time.

"Now, there had been a difference between the two conspirators. Carstairs, or Garbo, believed that the diamonds were hidden in Marsh's house. Stoddard believed they were in the old hilltop hotel, where Mooreland had been hiding before his death, and that they had never been in Marsh's possession. As it happened, neither was right."

"What?" Harrington asked, and then, as he cast a glance in Theresa's direction, his eyes narrowed.

"No," Whittaker repeated, "neither was right. About a month ago, Marsh discovered that the coffin containing the diamonds had disappeared. The person who took them had not been fooled by the boxful of nails which Marsh had used as a decoy. He had taken the right box. Marsh said nothing

about it; he thought he knew where the diamonds were, and he had strong hopes of getting them back."

"But where were they?" Harrington asked.

Whittaker did not reply, but he fixed an odd glance on Carmody. The old gentleman brushed back the shock of grey hair from his temple and grinned in an embarrassed manner.

"Yes," he admitted. "I took them away from Marsh. I didn't know about the decoy coffin. I just happened to find the right one. It's a long story. Maybe I'll tell it some day. Maybe Marsh suspected me; I don't know. I didn't tell anybody, not even Theresa."

"No," said Whittaker, "but Stoddard seemed to have a deep-rooted suspicion that Miss Lanyard knew where the diamonds were. He almost brought Carstairs around to the same way of thinking. Anyway, Carstairs thought it might be worth while trying to find out how much Miss Lanyard knew. He put her through a harrowing ordeal, but, of course, he didn't learn anything.

"Then Carstairs thought he would give Stoddard's idea another test. He still had a decoy coffin, the one loaded with nails. With great ostentation and a great show of innocence, he brought it here at a time when he knew Mr. Carmody was present. The trick almost worked. As soon as Mr. Carmody recovered from the shock, he did exactly what Carstairs had anticipated—rushed home to see if the coffin was safe. Luckily Mr. Harrington and I happened to be here ahead of him."

Harrington smiled. The district attorney's modesty was a little comical at times.

"But Stoddard?" Harrington asked. "What happened to him?"

"Oh, Stoddard. Well, beneath all his crookedness, Stoddard had a soft streak in him. Carstairs didn't like it. He was afraid Stoddard would cause him trouble. Besides, he confidently expected to get hold of the diamonds, and he didn't want to divide them. So he decided that Stoddard had to die."

With a very solemn air, Whittaker took a pistol from his pocket.

"Yesterday Carstairs handed Stoddard this pistol. He told him to go to Crooked Creek bridge and kill Storm. He said Storm might dig up some damaging evidence, and somebody had to stop him. It was only a subterfuge. Carstairs wasn't greatly concerned over anything Storm might find. His only idea was to get rid of Stoddard, and he was hoping that one of two things might happen—either that Storm would kill Stoddard in a pistol battle, or else that Stoddard would accidentally kill himself. As it happened, Stoddard was too late. Storm had already started back. But Carstairs's treacherous scheme worked out very nicely. Mr. Harrington and I trailed Stoddard to a hunter's shack. He tried to take a shot at us and he shot himself."

"How?" Harrington asked, but an idea was already forming in his mind.

"You see this pistol. It looks like any ordinary pistol, especially to a person not familiar with firearms. If Stoddard had opened it, he might have discovered something very peculiar about it, but he had no occasion to do that. Yes, it's a very

peculiar pistol. It doesn't fire a bullet, but a pointed steel slug, and it fires backward."

"Backward?" Harrington exclaimed.

"Yes, this part"—he indicated a point along the upper portion of the handle—"opens up when the trigger is pulled. A powerful steel spring evicts the slug with great force. If the person pulling the trigger holds the pistol as pistols are generally held, he gets the slug in his chest. If he holds it a little higher, he gets it in the throat. Carstairs told me he bought it from an inventor who had gone insane. It seems Marsh kept a pistol in his desk drawer.

"One day when Carstairs was prowling about the house looking for the diamonds, he found the pistol. He took it and left the trick pistol in its place. They were about the same size and shape. With his usual foresight, Carstairs anticipated that Marsh might take a shot at him some day when he was poking about the house. That anticipation was never fulfilled, but Marsh put this pistol in his pocket the day he started out to kill Mr. Harrington."

With a shiver Harrington stared at the weapon in the district attorney's hand.

"And afterward," Whittaker went on, "Mr. Harrington picked it up from the floor of the car. He had no reason to suspect that it was not an ordinary pistol. He carried it for a day or so, and then he was assaulted in the hilltop hotel, and the pistol returned to Carstairs's possession."

A pause fell. The listeners stared shudderingly at the diabolical weapon.

"But no slug was found in Marsh's body," Harrington pointed out.

"As I said before, Carstairs was at the hilltop hotel that night. He saw the lights of your car, and so he went out to investigate. You were not there. You had seen a light somewhere about the old hotel, and you thought the murderer had gone there. Naturally, feeling that you yourself might be suspected, you were anxious to catch him. And so, when Carstairs came up to the car, all he found was the body of Marsh. The slug had torn a hole in the throat, but had not gone in far. Carstairs pulled it out. If he had left it, we might have found the solution sooner. By pulling it out, he made it look as if nobody but you, Mr. Harrington, could have committed the murder."

Harrington's thoughts went back to a memorable evening. Again, in imagination, he saw Marsh's face in the dusk of the car.

"How did it happen that Marsh's hat was found in Carmody's house?" he asked presently.

"Likely as not Carstairs brought it there. For the sake of his own safety, he complicated the mystery all he could."

Harrington looked at Theresa sitting with lowered eyes beside Carmody, with a sombre smile on her lips. His thoughts went back to the night when they stood beside the ash heap in the cellar.

"You had competition, Mr. Harrington," the district attorney remarked. "Miss Lanyard, too, was trying to find Mooreland's murderer. You see, there were circumstances which made it look as if Mr. Carmody had had a hand in that affair. The whole chain of misunderstandings was due to his efforts to get hold of the coffin. Storm and I were

badly mistaken. Anyway, being the brave and loyal girl she is, Miss Lanyard wanted to clear Mr. Carmody of suspicion."

"And the diamonds?" Harrington asked, glancing about the room. His face clouded as for an instant he looked into Samuel Tarkin's shifty eyes.

Carmody brushed his shock of grey hair away from his temple and gave an embarrassed cough.

"I knew Marsh and Stoddard were crooks," he declared. "They had no right to the diamonds. That was why, when my chance came, I took them. I knew Carstairs was after them, too. It seemed to me I had as good a right to them as anybody. Besides——"

He faltered and looked affectionately at Theresa, and Harrington recalled what he had recently said, that it was the ambition of his life to leave a competence to his adopted daughter.

"Anyway," Carmody added, "half of the diamonds belong by rights to me, according to the terms of Mooreland's murder insurance. You know the provision he made, that, in case he should die a violent death, half of them should go to the person who could supply information leading to the detection of the murderer. It is rather late now, for the murderer is dead. Nevertheless," and with a dramatic flourish he drew a bulky envelope from his pocket, "I think these papers will convince you that Marsh was the murderer."

The listeners stared in astonishment as he handed the envelope to Whittaker. The district attorney fingered it perplexedly. A snicker sounded in the room, and he gave Samuel Tarkin a reproachful glance.

"Some of the papers in the envelope," Carmody explained, "give a detailed account of Mooreland's movements immediately before his death. They prove inferentially that Marsh murdered him. I've had that part of the evidence for some time. The others, which are of a more specific nature, have come to me just recently."

The tense silence which followed the statement was broken only by the shuffling of the papers in Whittaker's hands.

"And where did you get this evidence, Mr. Carmody?"

"Oh, the credit doesn't really belong to me. I got the evidence from Snooks."

"Snooks?"

"Yes, the faithful servant who followed Mooreland when he went into hiding. For reasons of his own, he doesn't want to appear personally in the affair. Snooks is a modest and unselfish sort. Now that his late master's murderer is beyond the reach of the law, he has lost interest. He made me a present of the evidence. He absolutely refused to accept a share in the diamonds. He has a deep-rooted conviction that they bring ill-luck. It would almost seem he is right."

Whittaker gaped at him for a moment, and then, with Storm at his side, began to examine the papers. Carmody went out on the piazza for a stroll and a smoke. Harrington and Theresa were standing at the window, their minds full of the events that had followed their first intimate talk beside the ash pile.

"I hope we are still partners," he said. "Remember what you promised?"

"I haven't forgotten," she murmured, and a soft smile illuminated her lovely grey eyes.

"Then—" He paused and looked disdainfully at Tarkin who had just slunk up to them in his furtive way. "Well, what do you want? Oh, I still owe you two thousand."

"You needn't growl at me," Tarkin whimpered. "I've done you some good turns, haven't I? I did you a good turn even when I took the coffin away from you. I thought the diamonds were in it; didn't know then it was loaded with nails. I figured somebody else would have got it away from you if I hadn't. You might have been murdered for it. Anyway, I wanted Mr. Carmody to have it. Yes, I've done you some good turns, and I've been kicked and cuffed for it. Say," and his unwholesome face wrinkled into a grin that displayed all his gold teeth, "you'd like to kick me again, wouldn't you?"

Harrington compressed his lips. A strange thought was stirring in his mind.

"When a fellow looks like a crook, he's got to act like a crook," said Tarkin sententiously. "If I had come to you like an honest man, you wouldn't have believed me. You'd have been afraid of me. It wouldn't have been so good. But you thought you could handle a crook who didn't pretend to be honest. And so——"

"Wait," Harrington broke in, "who the deuce are you?"

Tarkin rolled his shifty eyes at Theresa.

"I am Snooks," he said.

THE END

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